

***Meet Me at the Well:  
Take a Month and Water Your Soul***

by Virelle Kidder

**Companion Bible Study**

by Jocelyn Hamsher and Virelle Kidder

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## Foreword

Among the things I love most about walking with God, are his surprises along the way. Right when we're doing the next thing He's given us, a huge blessing waits on our path. That's what happened in the spring of 2009 while I was speaking at Moody Bible Institute's "Gathering for Women" in Cleveland, Ohio. I met Lisa Troyer, musician and Moody radio host from the sponsoring station. While I was speaking, God whispered to her obedient heart, "I want you to write worship music for this." We connected, found a new friendship, and prayed for God's leading. Less than a year later, through Lisa's enormous talents, the new "Meet Me at the Well" CD took life.

Just when I thought God's surprises were complete, Lisa suggested a thirteen-week Bible study to accompany both the book and CD. Through her ministry, Circle of Friends, she knew the perfect person to write it, pastor's wife and board member, Jocelyn Hamsher. I have to agree. Jocelyn is deep, wise, and fun. I love this Bible study! Aiding our project has been my good friend and superb editor, Michele Huey.

Working with these women has enriched my life immeasurably and birthed a dream partnership in ministry with Circle of Friends. We are now able to offer my book, *Meet Me at the Well*, along with a retreat series, Lisa's beautiful worship music on a companion CD, and a thirteen-week Bible study for women who desire solid spiritual growth and deep renewal. How good is God?

Lisa and I traveled to Nashville in October 2009 to record an hour-long radio show with Wayne Shepherd, the voice of Moody Radio for many years, along with his top producer, Joe Carlson. What a privilege that was. Thanks to Wayne, this radio special will be heard all over the country and available free as a promotional tool for those who wish to book a conference or retreat with both Lisa and me.

As you read this Bible study and respond to the Word of God, have your journal in hand. You won't want to miss a thing God says to you. Every word of God is life giving and precious, meant to revive our souls and guide us on each step through life. Why not invite a friend or small group to join you as you study, worship, grow, and drink in living water at the well? I promise you, your life will never be the same.

Virelle

## Week One

### The Living Water

Read Chapters 1 & 2 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

There is a woman in the Bible that every one of us can relate to. Maybe not because of her five husbands, nor even because of the “cat calls” she elicits from the townsmen, nor whispers from women when she walks by. We relate to this woman because her spirit is parched to the bone. She’s worn out by life physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This woman, whom we meet in John 4, Virelle has affectionately named Moriah. She comes to Jacob’s well every day at noon to collect her water, a time when no one else from town will be there. All the other women draw their water at the end of the day to avoid the heat. Not Moriah. Something tells me she is tired of taking “the heat” from those around her. Noon is a much safer time to come out in public.

Read John 4:1–42.

#### Jesus Is Intentional

Read John 4:4 again. What three words stand out to you in this verse?

This short verse holds big meaning. In their travels, devout Jews often took a long, out-of-the-way route to avoid Samaria for various reasons, one being the great hostility between Jews and Samaritans from centuries earlier. Samaritans, who were formerly Israelites, were looked upon as “impure” and not true children of God, as they had intermarried with the Assyrians during their captivity. Jesus was bucking the norm by going through Samaria. The words “had to go” didn’t mean that there was construction and Jesus had to follow a detour through Samaria to get to Galilee. The word “had” means “must, an unavoidable, urgent, intrinsic, compulsory necessity.” (*The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991) Jesus had to go through Samaria because He knew in His Spirit He had a divine appointment to keep. He knew there was an urgent need—one that He longed to fulfill. Jesus, God in flesh, knew her need from miles and miles away and met her where she was. Not only did He visit her town, but He also stopped at the exact place she frequented. That is God’s heart for us as well. He is intentional in finding us.

#### What about Us?

Oftentimes we try to hide who we are and how we really feel. We attempt to cover our faults and bury our insecurities. We steer clear of our internal mirror, just in case we catch a glimpse of what needs to be dealt with. But identifying where we are emotionally and what’s inside brings things to the surface so our thirst can be quenched. The fact is that Jesus already knows where we struggle. He is just waiting for us to

openly acknowledge it and to bring it to Him so He can heal us. Throughout the text of John 4, we have some indication that Moriah may have some areas of thirst. List some of those apparent areas. (For some ideas see verses 7–9, 11–12, 18, 22, 25.)

On pages 19 and 20, Virelle speaks to those who feel overwhelmed by responsibilities, to the point of wanting to quit. Running on an empty emotional tank, they feel torn in two by the needs of others, begging God for strength to get through each day. Does this describe you today? Are you overloaded, stressed out, anxious, discouraged, or depressed? Are you physically exhausted, emotionally empty or spiritually dry? List words that describe you at this season of your life.

### **Jesus Is Invitational**

Read John 4: 7–14.

As Jesus sat down at the well, He asked Moriah for a drink. She answers with surprise that He, a Jew, would ask such a thing. According to the Jews, she had several strikes against her. She was a woman, let alone one with a past. She was also from Samaria, “the wrong side of the tracks,” and therefore deemed “unclean.” Jesus was breaking every rule there was by speaking to her, let alone asking her for a drink. By Jewish standards, receiving a cup that she had touched would make Jesus Himself unclean.

When Jesus asked her for a drink, he instantly validated her value to Him! “Unclean” was not a label He would use. Instead of seeing a label, He saw her soul. A soul He created, a soul He knew intimately and loved. In seeking her out and speaking to her, He had every intention to invite her into relationship with Him. He wanted her to know Him—the One who could bring true satisfaction.

What was Jesus’ response to her question? (v.10)

Jesus doesn’t mess around but gets right to the point. “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink...” If only we would. God created us to know Him and love Him passionately.

Write the following verses:

Isaiah 43:10

Jeremiah 24:7

John 17:3

John 17:26

What do these verses tell us about God's heart for us?

What is this "living water" that Jesus told Moriah He could give her?

Jesus pointed to the water in the well and told her that this water will make her thirsty again. But the water He had for her will quench her thirst. This thirst that Jesus talked about was that painful longing for that would refresh, support and strengthen her soul.

Ever been there? This water is fresh, flowing and life-giving.

This water is Jesus Himself and what He can give.

This water is the Holy Spirit, eternal life, and the quenching of a parched body, mind and soul.

Virelle describes her overall "dry" condition (p. 21–23) and the message from Psalm 87:7 that was given to her when a conference director came to her door and handed her this verse. "As they make music they will sing, all my fountains are in you". Talk about a personal invitation from God Himself for renewal! Sounds a little like the same message Jesus gave to Moriah: "Come and get to know me. I can give you living water...."

### **What about Us?**

Want some good news? It's no sin to be tired.

**"...I see that body, mind, and spirit  
are one complete package. When one  
part suffers, the whole person  
suffers."** *Meet Me at the Well*, p. 23

Have you found Virelle's statement to be true? If so, how?

Many of us live to the point of exhaustion. We have lived in imbalance for weeks, months, and even years: working, caregiving, running a home, being involved in the church and the community, serving on four different committees in four different towns with meetings scheduled for the same night. You get my drift. We don't slow down. We don't even come to a rolling stop. Soon we become irritable and no fun to be around. Every day looks like another job to tackle so we can check it off our list. What's on your list today?

Yet, Jesus Himself extends to us an invitation for refreshment and renewal. Virelle points to Jesus as our example:

**“While on earth, Jesus met alone with His Father daily to drink deeply of the Water of Life. He taught His funny band of twelve the rhythm of coming away to rest and leave the madness behind.”**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 23*

If the Son of the Most High God needed to pull away from the busyness of ministry and “life” regularly, how much more do we?

Here's a surprise. For you and me, planning rest is as important as planning ministry or work. Just like you would schedule a social activity on your calendar, so you need to schedule times of retreat. When someone calls to invite you to yet another activity, you can simply tell them you have plans. There is no need to explain what or why. Because you have plans you cannot afford to miss—a date with the God of the Universe. Take a personal inventory:

Do I take time to rest?

Do I pull away from the routine and thoroughly enjoy myself?

Do I laugh?

Do I ever just sit and be still?

Do I go on walks and take in all the beauty God gave me to enjoy?

Do I ever plan a retreat time with the Lord?

How will I plan for rest and renewal from now on?

It is time to start enjoying life with the One who gave it to you. You have been given a personal invitation.

Write Psalm 43:4.

According to Scripture, who is He?

Oh Lord, thrill our hearts with You. Be our joy and delight.

### **Jesus Is Our Illuminator**

Read John 4:15–26.

As Moriah continues to ask about the living water (v.15), Jesus cuts to the chase. By hitting on a more personal note regarding her “husband,” He lovingly exposes the hidden places of her soul. As she begins to open up to Him, He tells her more about her life. Imagine how awkward that must have been! So, she changes the subject and talks about worship. This area of her life appears to be another need and Jesus illuminates that one too.

Moriah most likely had a tradition of religion. In verse 12 she refers to “our father Jacob.” In verse 20, she speaks of her forefathers worshiping on Mount Gerizim, a mountain held sacred by the Samaritans. Oh, she worshiped the true God. However the Samaritan Bible contained only the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) and rejected the rest of the canon of Scripture. Samaritans didn’t know Jesus as the Messiah, only as a teacher. Jesus told her, “You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.” Moriah had a faith heritage. She had faith traditions. But the question is, did she have Jesus?

Jesus desires intimacy with us. The very thing Moriah was seeking in human relationships, now stood right before her. He wants to give Himself to us and desires us to give our hearts and lives to Him. He says, “A time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” He wants us to worship Him with a true spirit that flows from within us, from the affections of our hearts.

Moriah had needs—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Jesus lovingly drew them out and spoke truth to her. When Jesus told her everything she had ever done, she had to have felt vulnerable, perhaps even ashamed. But I would also surmise that even in those feelings, she may have felt a strange sense of comfort. When Jesus illuminates our “stuff,” it can be frightening and unsettling. But when the light comes on in our hearts,



He illuminates Himself as well. “I who speak to you am He.” You are not alone. God wants our best. Our best is not rooted in our selfish wants or desires, but in His glory. Jesus wants to illuminate our needs, too. He wants to unearth the “junk” in our past, so we can move forward with Him refreshed and at peace.

### **What about Us?**

Has there been a time when God illuminated a buried need or issue in your life? What did He show you?

Have you ever found yourself looking for validation or acceptance in human relationships? Have you looked to others to meet needs that only God can meet? What did you discover?

Has there been an area of your life where you felt held back or stuck? What do you think led you there or has kept you there?

Write Psalm 142:5–7.

There is One who meets our “desperate need.” One who delivers us from those things that oppress us and bring us low, from those things which are too strong for us to overcome. It is He who sets us free from our prison and gives us a voice to praise Him. There is hope for us, just like there was hope for Moriah. For some of us, our prison may be a bone-dry existence in a religious heritage or tradition rather than a vibrancy immersed in a personal, living relationship with Jesus. Have you personally asked Jesus into your heart to be Lord of your life? Many assume they are Christians because they have gone to church all of their lives, served on committees or because they taught Sunday school for 40 years. Unless we have taken action and surrendered our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, we have not yet tasted Living Water. Ask Him into your heart today. Tell Him of your desperate need. He is waiting with arms and heart open wide. (See p. 31 of *Meet Me at the Well*.)

We all have a desperate need every day we wake up. We would be deceiving ourselves to think otherwise. May we never forget that we are hopeless without Him and desperately needy for Him. We are desperately needy for His Presence and for the Truth of His Word, for the Life He brings. Oh, Lord, that we would tell You constantly how much we need You.

Jesus wants us to be honest with Him. He already knows us inside and out. He knows what we need help with, what we need saved from, and who we need to forgive. But to be honest with Him, we need to first be honest with ourselves.

**“She’s a sinful woman, and she knows it. Facing ourselves honestly, sins and stupidity included, is huge. It’s also the launch pad for renewal. You and I need the same bold courage. No masks, no pretending we’re in better shape than we are. Just tell Him the truth: We’re bone-dry.”**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 30*

It’s time to be real. Jesus can handle it. Jesus is shining His light on us—on our best and on the rest. He is beckoning us to come to Him with our “stuff.” It’s okay He is our Safe Place, our Refuge, our Deliverer.

For further reflection, read Psalm 18.

### **Jesus Changes Our Identity**

Read John 4:27–30, 39–42

After Jesus reveals Himself to Moriah, she leaves her water jar and goes back to town. Verse 29 says she begins telling people about this man she met, a man who knew a whole lot about her. Could this be the Messiah? Several things jump off the page in this section of Scripture. Moriah left her water jar to go tell them—how symbolic of a thirst quenched. She laid down the vessel which carried physical water and became the vessel filled with Living Water. She ran back to a town of people who had no respect for her and began to tell them amazing news. This was a society that looked down upon her, people who ridiculed her. The joy of her good news far outweighed her fear or disdain of them. With a heart bursting with jubilation, she had to tell this news! She could not contain it. The fountains within her had no choice but to flow. This woman whom others looked at strangely and with disrespect, this emotionally and spiritually thirsty woman, was sent by God Himself to evangelize a lost town. Her shame was removed. Just being with Jesus Christ had changed her. Christ validated her, valued her, removed her shame, and restored her with Himself—the Living Water. He had changed her identity from a woman labeled by man to one now labeled by Love.

Verse 39 says that many of the Samaritans believed because of the woman's testimony. And because of her testimony, the Samaritans went to Jesus. She extended the invitation and Jesus revealed Himself. "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

### **What about Us?**

How has God changed your identity since you came to know Him?

Describe your Samaria. What sphere of influence has God given you to invite someone else with you to the well?

If you find yourself thirsting for refreshment, there is hope right around the corner. Whether it is salvation for a new believer or renewal for a seasoned believer, the answer is Him. Just as it was essential for Jesus to make time to meet with His Father alone, to rejuvenate, to refocus, to talk to Him, to listen to Him, simply just to "be" with Him, it's even more important for us. God isn't surprised that we become dry in life. He's surprised that we don't come to Him more quickly for satisfaction. Only His Presence changes us, saves us, and brings us life.

**"Jesus experienced deep thirst too. He was thirsty to do the will of God . . . Thirsty to bring His Father praise and honor and worship . . . We aren't born with that kind of thirst. We're reborn with it. The greatest joy in our journey toward renewal is recovering our thirst for God's glory, our own song of praise to Him."** *Meet Me at the Well*, (pp. 30–31).

Meeting with Him is the first step on the path to renewal. Have you accepted His invitation to relationship and intimacy, too? It's time to meet Him at the well.

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters....*

*Isaiah 55:1*

*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. John 7:37–38*

*“Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Revelation 22:17*

**Write out a prayer of response to God in the space below and date it.**

## Week Two

### Running to God

Read Chapters 3 and 4 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

Are you the type that challenges the gas gauge in your car? Maybe it's on "E," and the red light is on, but your mental banter is in full swing between, "I have three more stops, then I'll stop at the gas station across town," and "You better stop; you're pushing your luck." What do you choose? I usually fuel up after driving on fumes to my three stops. Soon my heart is relieved and my mental stress has died down. I'm grateful to have made it. Why then, two weeks later do I find myself doing the same thing again? You, too? You'd think we would learn. This same mentality and behavior regarding the big, red "E" does not stop when we get out of our cars. As women, we tend to keep the accelerator down in life. Just one more thing to do before I can stop for the day . . .

Read 1 Kings 19:1–18.

#### Running on Empty

Reread verses 1–5.

Describe what the prophet of God, Elijah, did that Ahab was recounting to Jezebel in verse 1. (Read 1 Kings 18:16–40.)

King Ahab, the seventh king of Israel, married Jezebel, a foreign princess. Not only did Ahab worship the one true God and consult His prophets from time to time, but because of Jezebel's influence he began to serve and worship false gods as well. One of those false gods was Baal, a god of fertility. According to scripture, King Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord and provoked the Lord to anger more than any other king before him. His wicked heart was not working alone, however. His teammate and wife, Jezebel, carried a mission to destroy all of God's prophets in Israel while replacing them with the prophets of Baal.

Along with Elijah, who all were present on the top of Mount Carmel? (See 1 Kings 18:19.)

It was quite the crowd, and the atmosphere would have been intense emotionally and spiritually, wouldn't you say? Not to mention the amount of hours spent on Mount Carmel trying to determine who was the true God.

Roughly, how many hours were spent on the top of Mount Carmel that day?  
(See 1 Kings 18:26, 29.)

Can you imagine the power that flowed through and around Elijah during those hours? He had the entire nation of Israel watching and 850 prophets in attendance who were all shouting and cutting themselves with continual “frantic prophesying” all day long. Add in the passing hours, the physical labor of building the altar and trench work, and the supernatural power that flowed through him all day, protecting him, guiding him, and giving him words to say. Finally, he witnessed God’s supernatural outpouring as fire fell from the sky, burning up the sacrifice and even the water surrounding it! The Presence and power of the Lord was so strong, all the people fell on their faces and began worshipping God. After they worshiped, a slaughter ensued as they killed all of the Baal prophets. Not your typical day.

My husband, who is a pastor, often shares how he feels the Spirit’s leading on Sunday mornings when preaching. God gives him word pictures, ideas out of the blue, things he hadn’t planned on sharing. He is emotionally and mentally tired after preaching—sometimes so tired he has to lie down and take a nap after church. As Elijah spoke and acted on the mountain that day in the fullness of God’s power, I believe he had to have been emotionally, physically, and mentally spent when all was said and done. Then he heard Jezebel’s threat (1 Kings 19:2).

What did Elijah do after hearing this threat (v. 3)?

Describe Elijah’s emotional and physical state in verses 4–5.

I used to find it interesting that an esteemed prophet of the Lord, who had just been through the most amazing supernatural experience of his life, let fear send him running when a mere mortal threatened his life. He had stood in the presence of 850 enemy prophets who could have easily taken him out at any time. It appears that he was not only fearful and exhausted, but also downright discouraged, hopeless, and feeling as though he had a feeble faith. “I have had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors” (1 Kings 19:4).

Here was one of God’s chosen feeling exhausted, afraid, and responding in sheer emotion. Ladies, we are not alone.

## What about Us?

**With the best intentions, women often take on, or are left with, others with huge needs. Why? Because we feel it's our job. And no one else has volunteered. Whether we ought to do the caregiving or not, our response is powerful and emotional. But caring for others' deep needs exhausts us to our core. There's a limit to how much anyone can do."**

*Meet Me at the Well, pp. 36–37*

Can you relate? If so, how?

Have you ever come the point when you realized you can't do it all? If so, how did you come to this discovery?

We all get tired. Whether it is caring for others, juggling the many roles of life, or doing all kinds of “good” things, we can wear out. What we need to be very aware of is this: When we become tired, the tank can empty quickly. If we are not refueling at the well regularly, this emptiness leads to vulnerability. We may become vulnerable to distraction, fear, pride, or deception. When we are vulnerable, our ability to keep alert is lessened and our guard is down. We begin to operate in our own strength and distance ourselves from God. If we think we are exempt from this tendency, all we need to do is look to the Bible. Individuals such as Moses, David, and Jesus' disciples all fell prey—people who were pillars in the faith.

Read 1 Peter 5:8–9. What vital instruction does Peter tell believers and why (v. 8)?

What should be our plan of action (1 Peter 5:9, James 4:7–8)?

Read Luke 10:38–42.

It is essential to be protected from our enemy, whether it is deception or distraction. Reread verse 40: “Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.” The word *preparations* in the Greek means “service, attendance, ministry.” (*The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991) When I discovered what this word meant, I almost fell off my chair. Good activities, even serving and ministry, can be the very things that deplete us. They can keep us from visiting the well and hinder us from sitting at the feet of Jesus, the Living Water. Some of us have trouble saying “no” and find ourselves with too many irons in the fire. Others thoroughly enjoy and thrive on activity. And still others have been put in situations in which they had no choice. The activity or responsibility found them. Martha’s gift was serving, and I think responsibility found her that day. When life is extraordinarily active, some seasons more than others, we need to be wise and make more frequent stops at the well.

In order to be effective in ministry and in caring for others, we need to be refreshed ourselves. We need His strength, enabling and directing, as we pour ourselves out for others. Imagine sitting at Jesus’ feet like Mary, leaning against His chest like John, sitting on His lap like a precious child. When we come near, we find protection, rejuvenation, and rest.

### **Fed by God**

Read 1 Kings 19:5–9.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Elijah. Read the following Scriptures and list other individuals who experienced a visit from an angel and the reason why.

Genesis 16:7–9: |

Genesis 18:1–2, 9–10: |

Genesis 32: 22–30: |

Exodus 33:12–23: |

The heart of God is compassionate and tender. God knew what they needed and provided. In the same way, God knew that Elijah was exhausted. He provided him rest, protection, and nourishment. Not only did he come to him once, but twice. He was His Provider and Sustainer.

As amazing as these visitations from God were, we are offered something even greater. God has revealed Himself to you and me through His Son. Jesus is the exact



representation of God's glory, His heart, and His character. God has fed us with Himself, the Bread of Life and the Living Water. He continues to be our Strength and Provider. It is by His Spirit, which was given to us on the day we received Him as Lord, that we can have God with us every single moment. He has visited and stayed.

Write out Ephesians 1:13–14.

Write out 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.

### **What about Us?**

Have you ever experienced a time of rest when God simply took care of you? Describe your experience.

It is essential that we spend time in retreat and rest regularly. Even Jesus chose to get away from the demands of the people and run to His Father. He took His disciples away from the crowds after they spent time ministering. "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31). To confess we need a break or a time of retreat is not weakness. It is wisdom. Perhaps it is a walk or time alone in prayer and reading the Word. Maybe it is enjoying time with a trusted friend over a cup of coffee, or dancing before the Lord in your living room. Maybe it's like Elijah, falling in an exhausted heap before the Lord and pouring out your heart. Virelle speaks of the necessity of confession when it comes to renewal.

**When my faith falters, it's no surprise to God. Confession releases my fear and brokenness and brings welcome relief and hope. It puts the outcome totally out of my hands and into His merciful ones. Blessed relief!"**

*Meet Me at the Well*, pp. 38–39

Write a prayer to the Lord and bring Him your heart. Tell Him your longings and desires; honestly confess your need. Are you exhausted, discouraged, looking for rest and nourishment? Tell Him. Are you fed up with caring for people, sensing your faith has grown feeble? You can safely bring it all to Jesus. He wants to be your sustenance. He wants you to come away with Him for a time of rest.

### **His Presence Alone**

Read 1 Kings 19:9–18.

Elijah fled but He ran directly to the mountain of God. Horeb, meaning “wilderness area,” is the general term for the area of Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai is the site in Exodus 19 where God revealed Himself to Moses and made His covenant of faithfulness to the Israelites.

Why do you think Elijah fled there after experiencing Mount Carmel and the other miracles God had done through him? Maybe he wanted to tattle on the Israelites. Maybe, like a scared child, he wanted to run from the danger, straight into the arms of his Father. I wonder if Elijah, in his fear and flight, was aware that he ran straight to the place where God had manifested Himself centuries earlier. Whatever the reason, Elijah ran to God for answers.

The Lord’s question to Elijah in verse 11 means we can safely assume God had not called him there. Even so, God saw his weakened state and fed him. And when He listened to Elijah’s reason for coming, He didn’t respond in anger. He didn’t scold him for his fear or lack of faith. He didn’t criticize him for his emotional response. He didn’t rebuke him with a firm reminder of Mount Carmel and how He had powerfully revealed Himself to Elijah. Instead, He generously and lovingly invited him to stand in His Presence. He does the same for you and me.

After God’s revelation of His powerful, yet tender Presence, God asked Elijah again why he had come. Elijah responded in the same way. I don’t know if he ever understood what God was trying to say or acknowledged that he’d responded hastily to Jezebel’s threat. But that didn’t hinder God’s plan for Elijah or His plan for the hope and future of Israel. He gave Elijah instructions on what to do next. God was calling in reinforcements. Elijah was not the only prophet left in Israel after all. And so Elijah went from there (v. 19).

In the moments that God revealed Himself, I believe something happened. Even though Elijah seemed to fail to fully realize his error, I find Elijah's change of demeanor amazing. His strength appeared to be rejuvenated, his fear dissipated. Was it because God had reassured him of the bigger picture? It could be. But I think even more, it was the fact that Elijah had simply been in God's Presence. To be in the Presence of the Almighty and not be changed is impossible. The wind, earthquake, and fire announced His arrival, but a gentle whisper revealed His heart.

His Presence alone . . .

Have you ever "fled" from a situation? Where did you go or to whom did you run?

Have you ever "fled" to God? How were you changed?

### **What about Us?**

How often have we done good things faithfully, taken care of people tirelessly, and then fallen in an exhausted heap when tragedy strikes or our energy bottoms out? We get angry and cry out to God. "I have given the neighbors bread, taken my mother to the doctor every week and the kids to all their activities, kept the family fed, worked two jobs, and served on the hospitality committee at church. I have been so faithful to You. How could You let this happen?"

**Where will you and I go when we are disappointed and angry over what God allows? Will we quit? Give up? Or will we exist like so many, weak and bitter all our lives, living only a form of faith, having no joy or growth, no song to sing? Where else would I go?**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 45*

**What else did I want in life but to follow Christ and know Him? The truth was, nothing. I wanted nothing more than that. I overheard myself pray, “Even if You give me nothing that I ask, nothing I want, I’ll still believe. I won’t quit.”**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 44*

Elijah had been empowered and did great things for the Lord. But then tragedy struck and Elijah ran to God and cried out to Him. Did his tone reflect fear, anger, defensiveness? You bet. God spoke and Elijah had a choice. He could choose to walk away, or he could choose to follow and obey. He chose God.

What about you? Have you ever experienced a time when you realized there was nowhere else to go but Christ?

For many years, I chased a dream. I found contentment hard to come by. I wrestled with God, grew angry with God, and threw myself frequent pity parties. My husband asked me one day, “Even if your dream doesn’t come to pass, even if God chooses not to bless you in this way, is He alone enough for you? Is He enough?”

This is the question that every heart must contemplate. He is Everything. He is the only thing that satisfies. Nowhere else can I go to receive what He offers. Yes. He is enough. He is all there is.

*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. John 6:69*

*But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds. Psalm 73:28*

*Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. Mark 6:31*

## Week Three

### **Resting and Relinquishing**

Read Chapters 5 and 6 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

“Mom, I want this!” My son held up a coveted new toy and ran to me as I placed groceries in the cart. “I have saved my money and I want to buy this! Can I get it?” The toy, cheaply made at best, only slightly resembled his birthday present hidden in my closet at home. Like most moms, I reminded him to use wisdom when spending his money. I wish I could say that he said, “Hey, Mom, I see your point. You are wise and wonderful. Thanks so much for the reminder. I will put it right back and wait until I find something to purchase that makes much more sense.” But I can’t. What followed included whining, pleading, and plenty of frustration for us both.

Oh, that our children would trust that we want their best! Parents are not out to “torment” their children for pure enjoyment, but rather, we want to see them learn and grow, recognize the counterfeit from the genuine, and be willing to wait for what’s best. Our hearts as parents, though flawed, dimly reflect the heart of our Heavenly Father. How He wants us to learn the same thing!

#### **Resting in His Love**

Read Mark 10:17–21.

Here he comes. This young man, eager and out of breath, runs up to Jesus and falls on his knees before Him. Can’t you just imagine? His hair is mussed, and beads of perspiration line his upper lip. He asks the question he has been mulling around in his mind for the last week: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” His eyes are fixed on Jesus, his heart is optimistic, and he truly wants to know the answer.

How does Jesus respond to him in verse 18?

Why do you think His response focuses on God?

The young man had called Jesus, “teacher.” In the Greek dictionary, the word means just that, “teacher.” It was meant as a name of respect. Teachers played a special part in providing instruction and interpreting God’s purposes. However, this term was way too limiting to address the Son of God. I wonder if Jesus didn’t answer the young man with a focus on God because He knew this young man’s heart was that of a student seeking a teacher and the right action, not a student seeking God and the right heart.

Jesus answers the man with a list of commandments. As you read through these commandments in verse 19, what do they all have in common?

After the young man has reassured Jesus of his “obedience” to these commands, Jesus looks at him. What does verse 21 say He does simultaneously?

As Jesus looked at the man, He loved him. The word “love” is *agapao* in the Greek. This word encompasses not only a love by choice, but also a love in which one finds joy in something. It is used of God’s love toward us. When Jesus looked at this man and read his heart, He responded with the purest, most unselfish love there is and told him what to do next. He wanted his best. He wasn’t out to “torment” him, but wanted him to learn and grow. He wanted him to be able to discern between the counterfeit and the genuine, between religion and relationship.

What did Jesus instruct the young man to do in verse 21?

The commandments Jesus gave the young man in verse 19 all have to do with loving others. It may appear to be the same with this last instruction in verse 21, “sell everything you have and give to the poor.” However, this last command was solely related to loving God. As Jesus read this man’s heart, He knew where his passions rested. He knew what separated him from his loyalty to the Lord. He loved wealth more. Jesus told him to give it all up, lay it all down, in order to give himself fully to God.

### **What about Us?**

We can be so much like the rich young ruler—striving, working, wanting to get it right. Our desire is to figure out all the answers so we can perform well—not just for others and ourselves, but also for God. Becoming so focused on getting it right can sometimes cause us to miss the lesson altogether. We allow other things to get in the way of our love relationship with God; we do things out of obligation or for “brownie points” rather than for Him. Along with the temptation of striving in our strength comes the deception of self-sufficiency. Jesus looks at us in love and says, “Lay it down and love Me more. Stop striving so hard and follow Me. Rest in My love.”

Do you tend to strive in your own strength? If so, how?

Read Romans 8:31–39.

When I first read that I was “more than a conqueror” through Christ, I was thrilled. What an awesome truth! However, as a conqueror I’d have to fight and work hard, battling the

many spiritual foes that come my way. Battling takes a lot of energy. To be honest, there are many days I hardly feel like a conqueror, let alone “more” than one. But as I reread these verses recently, I was struck in a fresh new way.

What three things make us “more than conquerors” through Christ?

Verse 33:

Verse 34:

Verses 35, 39:

Amazing. We need to battle actively every day against things that challenge the truth of God’s Word and His character. Lies from the world or situations that life hands us can discourage or deceive us. But these verses remind us that no matter what struggles we may face, His love is greater. We are more than conquerors because

- we have a God who has excused us from guilt and declared us as innocent,
- we have a Savior who is constantly interceding for us at the right hand of the Father, and
- we are loved with a constant, unending, inseparable, unconditional love.

We are more than conquerors when we battle, but ultimately when we rest in His love.

Write Isaiah 30:15:

How can you apply these truths to the things you face right now?

### **Relinquishing All**

Read Mark 10:22–31.

Sadly, when Jesus invited the young man to follow Him, he chose to walk away. Either he missed the lesson or he didn’t want to receive it. Either way, his heart was so torn by the choice between wealth and God that he didn’t have room to receive God’s love. He walked away with all of his possessions, but with an empty heart. When we can receive and rest in God’s love for us, then we can begin to love sacrificially.



Read Ephesians 3:17–19.

What does Paul want the Ephesian church to know (vv. 18–19)?

Why does he want them to know this (v. 19)?

On page 57, Virelle cites various examples in Scripture of those who demonstrated sacrificial love: Abraham, Queen Esther, Jesus' mother, Mary, and, of course, Jesus Himself.

**Don't think for a minute they did it on their own. In every instance, God gave what they needed as they looked to Him. You and I can too."**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 57*

When we trust in this immense love that Christ has for us, we find an endless supply. Paul describes it as a love that surpasses knowledge! We cannot understand it in its fullness. Even though this is hard to comprehend completely, we still have access to the Source. When we need to give up something of self or when there are difficult people to love and reach out to, it is possible to do it with God's help and strength. With such a perfect love holding us, we are anchored in Him when He asks us to love sacrificially.

After watching the young man's response, Jesus pointed out the difficulty the rich face to enter heaven. Was Jesus just picking on the rich? I don't think so. Scripture does warn us that the love of money can lead us down a path of destruction. But the beginning of Psalm 52:7 hits on a key point. Read it and write it in your own words.

Any time we do not make God our stronghold, our refuge, our favorite, we have walked away. Any time we depend on something else to save us, we are already defeated. Jesus spoke specifics to this man because the love of wealth was his captor. But Jesus also speaks to you and me. What holds us back from following Him without reservation?

This declaration by Christ in Mark 10:24–25 left the disciples feeling hopeless. Can you imagine them in verse 26, looking at one another, jaws dropped, thinking that none of them had a chance? Then in verse 27, Jesus spoke life-giving truth. By ourselves, we don't have a chance. It is only by the grace and power of God that we can be saved.

Take a moment to thank Jesus for His sacrificial love for you. Not only does He offer salvation through the cross, but He is also a well of love whenever we ask Him.

The rich young ruler walked away, but the disciples left everything to follow Him. Peter says so in verse 28. Because every young Jewish boy wanted to become a rabbi, they would go to school at age six to study and memorize the Torah. At age ten, the best students would move on to learn the rest of the Scriptures and the art of asking and answering questions. By age fourteen, only students from the cream of the crop would move on to the next level of education. Those who succeeded this far would approach a rabbi that he respected and desired to learn from, and ask him if he could become his student. If the rabbi thought the student knew his stuff, he would say three words that every Jewish boy wanted to hear, “Come, follow me.” The young man would then leave his home, family, town, and local synagogue and follow the rabbi where he went. A student would give up his life to follow his rabbi, learn from him, and imitate all that he did. However, there were some Jewish boys who did not make the cut—they were not rabbi material. And when they approached the rabbi of their choice to ask for discipleship, the rabbi would tell them to return to their family and learn the family business—fishing, carpentry, or farming. So where did Jesus the Rabbi, the Messiah, the Savior of the World, find His disciples? James, John, Andrew, and Peter were all fishing. Hmmm, that must make them rabbi flunkies. But when Jesus walked by them, what did He say? “Come, follow me.” The three words every Jewish boy wanted to hear. And they left everything to follow Him.

It didn't matter to Jesus that they weren't the “best of the best” students or didn't have it all together. It didn't matter that they were blue collar fisherman or that Matthew had a bad reputation as a cheating tax collector. Jesus saw what they could become. And when He called, they accepted. These guys left family, home, livelihood, hometown, everything familiar to them. They left it all to follow Jesus.

Read Mark 10:29. List the seven things Jesus says some choose to leave for Him.

How much does He say they will receive if they have left those things for Him? Write your answer in the space below, then underline it in your Bible.

When will they receive them (v. 30)?

God always provides. Just like you, I have friends who have given up things for the Lord. Where He has called, they have followed. Caregivers who care for family members with special needs, those who have adopted children or serve as foster parents, missionary and pastor families who have left homes, family, income, and lands. Those who have put Christ first, given of self, and became a living sacrifice. The truth is that when we do this, we will be rewarded and taken care of. The phenomenal thing Scripture says is that this begins now—we don't have to wait until eternity! In this present age He will provide those things that we have been called to give up to serve Him: a home a pastor left in one part of the country only to be given one in another, earnings sacrificed that were later provided because the Lord moved someone else to give! With sacrifice comes His grace of provision, in fact, one hundred times as much.

Not only does Jesus reassure Peter with this promise of provision, but He also cautions him about something that accompanies sacrifice. Reread verse 30. What is it?

Read the following verses and write the phrases that stand out to you.

John 15:18–21:

Matthew 5:10:

2 Corinthians 4:8–9:

2 Thessalonians 1:3–5:

Persecution. It comes with following Jesus and with sacrificial love. Jesus reminds us in Luke 15:25–33 that each of us must consider the cost of following Him. Joyful is she who counts the cost and still wants Jesus more than anything.

## What about Us?

Receive. Rest. Relinquish. Sacrifice. Persecution. Provision. Jesus Christ is inviting us to follow Him. Following Jesus is not an easy road, but it is the only road worth traveling.

**“I soon learned that sacrificial love isn’t fun. It’s like standing still and getting beaten up.”**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 57*

Describe a time when God asked you to love sacrificially.

What did you learn about sacrificial love or God Himself? What were the difficulties of sacrifice? What were the rewards?

Jesus spoke specifics to the rich young ruler. He speaks specifics to you and me. Luke 15:33 says, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” Does this sound harsh? Why do you think Jesus said it?

What does God want most from us?

If you find yourself turning to anything other than Jesus Christ (for example, food, money, alcohol, a parent, or friend), this is the time to confess it and give yourself wholeheartedly to Jesus.

**“Nowhere is pure love more clearly seen than in Christ’s death on the cross. He showed a spiritually dead world what love really is when He died on our behalf. He let the whole world know how much God loves us by breaking His own heart and offering His only Son, Jesus, as a love sacrifice for our sins. Has anybody ever loved you more? Is there anyone you and I cannot love with the same Jesus living inside us?”**  
*Meet Me at the Well, pp. 57-58*

Whom is God asking you to love?

Jesus looks at each one of us and says, “Come, follow me.” God may not be calling you to leave your home, but He may be nudging you to make a phone call. He may not be asking you to become a missionary in Africa, just in your neighborhood. Let’s ask Him for eyes to see inconveniences as opportunities. This week, why not contact someone who needs God’s love? Let’s continue to be in prayer about becoming women who love sacrificially, women who love like Jesus.

*But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33*

*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:37–39*

Week Four

## **Thick Skin and Thank You's**

Read Chapters 7 and 8 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

I woke up early, threw on some sweats and a comfortable t-shirt, pulled my hair back, and ran to the store before my family awoke. At the checkout, a young woman stood in line behind me. I recognized her vaguely, and we politely exchanged greetings. She then asked, "Did you just get up?" I laughed, responded in good humor, and made my way to the car. People. Aren't we interesting? After twelve years of being a pastor's wife, I've seen all kinds. Some bring joy and give us energy. Others take energy out of us just trying to relate to them! Everyone can rub people the wrong way, whether we mean to or not.

Just like Virelle and Steve once received wise counsel to "take no offense," my husband received a similar warning early in ministry. A fellow pastor cautioned, "If you're going to be a pastor, you have to have thick skin!" We have found that to be ever so true. To serve and to love like Jesus did, we need thick skin.

### **Thick Skin**

What does thick skin mean? It's the ability to deflect another's rude, hurtful, or unfounded comments and not hold it against him. Thick skin also means receiving constructive criticism and bringing it before the Lord instead of reacting. It is also setting healthy boundaries in our relationships for our protection. Without them people can wear us out quickly. We'll have nothing left to give. But when healthy boundaries exist, our energy is maintained and we can go the distance.

Read Exodus 18:13–23.

What healthy boundary did Moses implement with Jethro's encouragement?  
(It starts with a "d" and most of us don't do it very well.)

Why had he not done something like this earlier (vv. 15, 19)?

What beliefs do you think Moses held that prohibited him from delegating his responsibilities?

Even though Moses was helping the people in deciding their cases, he was actually hindering them in the process. How so?

Not only were the people being hindered, but Jethro thought Moses was as well. Write Jethro's words of advice to Moses in verse 18.

In Jethro's proposal of delegation, what would be the outcome (vv. 22–23)?

The healthy boundary Jethro proposed kept Moses doing what he was called to do. Delegation lightened his load and equipped others to learn and “own” the laws that God had instituted. Let's not forget—people went home satisfied!

### **What about Us?**

It's self-evaluation time. Ouch. How many times have we attempted to tackle something only to wind up overwhelmed and exhausted? Most of us are not good “delegators.” We want a task done a certain way, and those helping may do it differently or not in the time frame we would prefer. Sometimes we just do it ourselves because we've asked for help and no one responds! No matter how full our plate, we take on another task. As valid as those reasons are, they do bring out the control freak in us, don't they?

What kind of “delegator” are you? Be honest.

What keeps you from doing so more freely?

Delegation enables us to guard against depletion, giving up, or fleeing from life's responsibilities. As Virelle mentioned on page 71, it's not wrong to want to run away. That desire just means it's time to take care of ourselves. Healthy boundaries are one way of doing that. Delegation can feel like losing control. It means not having a task done “right” or the way we would have done it. It means sometimes that the “ball” gets dropped. Someone we depended on may let us down and the task remains undone. This is

when we need to be able to let it go and resist the temptation to pick it up. Healthy boundaries keep us from physical and emotional burnout.

Delegating means benefiting ourselves. Delegating also means benefiting others. Just like Moses equipped the Israelites by relinquishing control and teaching them how to rule, we must do the same. In delegating to others, we are equipping, we are teaching, and we are enabling others to step out and grow. When we see people who are gifted in a certain area, we need to tap them on the shoulder and encourage them to step out in their gifting. Read Ephesians 4:1–16.

What were the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers supposed to do (v. 12)?

Why (vv. 13–15)?

Who receives the ultimate benefit (v. 16)?

When we encourage others and give them an opportunity to serve, the body of Christ benefits. The body of Christ needs *all* Christ followers to utilize their gifts to bring energy and life to the body. As we grow in and exercise our faith individually and collectively as a church, the body of Christ continues to mature and become stronger. The cells and organs of our body each have a specific function they have been created to do; God fashioned them to function together to provide life. So it is with the body of Christ. As individuals operate in what God has called them to do, so the body grows more mature in fulfilling God's purposes. Delegating to others lightens our load and equips others for opportunity.

Some of us who are experiencing an overload or a desire to run may not have an opportunity to delegate. In fact, we would love to give some responsibility away! But our situation, much like Virelle's, does not fall into that category. This is where the second purpose of boundaries comes into play. Healthy boundaries help to provide a framework of truth. Because we deal with people, the possibility of dealing with flawed and sinful attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives is high. We can't always provide what people ask for or expect from us, nor are we meant to. Within healthy boundaries, our goal is to honor and obey Jesus Christ first and foremost—hence, our framework of truth. So why is setting healthy boundaries considered having “thick skin”? Because people don't like them. When our goal is to take orders from God and honor Him first, we can experience conflict and persecution from those we serve and relate to.



There are some we will never please. Ladies, did you hear that? We women, more than men, have the tendency to want to please. We want to rescue, help, and nurture. But if we continue to pour ourselves out over and over to those who are never satisfied, we are headed for emotional and mental turmoil. Not to mention the spiritual confusion that takes place as we strive to do what we think a “good Christian” should, and yet continue to be thrown in front of the proverbial bus. There is something I have learned that has brought me much freedom. As a Christian, I am responsible to help others with their physical needs. I am to honor and love, but I am not responsible, nor am I capable, to meet others’ emotional needs. There is only One who can do that.

**I love my mother very much and always have, but living under one roof would never work. . . . I finally sought counseling with a Christian counselor whose assurances with biblical boundaries changed my life and set me free from false guilt. He explained I could serve Mother with the purpose of pleasing God alone, and not try to make her happy, an impossible task.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 69*

Is there a situation in your life in which you have a desire to run away? If so, describe it.

Read Galatians 1:10. Is there a situation in your life where you need to stop pleasing people first and focus on pleasing God? If so, describe it.

**He learned to take His orders  
and rewards from His  
heavenly Father alone.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 64*

Once again, Jesus is our great example for healthy boundaries. When Jesus was only twelve, unbeknownst to His parents, He did not return home with them after the Passover feast in Jerusalem. His parents returned to the temple in a panic, anxiously looking for Him. In Luke 2:48–49, Mary was upset and asked Jesus, “Son, why have you treated us like this?” He responded, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” Even though we may think this sounds insensitive or even disrespectful, it wasn’t. Jesus knew, even at this young age, that His Heavenly Father came first. Despite what they thought or the interesting family dynamics that resulted, He set boundaries with His parents and with His brothers as well (John 7:3–8).

Jesus drew boundaries with the Pharisees. In Matthew 15 Jesus challenged the Pharisees regarding their legalistic practices. The disciples came to Him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?” Jesus responded not with fear or regret that He spoke truth, but with a confident boldness. He instructed His disciples to forget the Pharisees and their response. They were “blind guides” and their hearts were hardened.

Another example of healthy boundary setting is one we have already discussed in Mark 6. After the disciples returned from ministering, Jesus pulled them aside and said, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” The word for “rest” in Mark 6:31 is *anapauo*. The latter part of the word, *pauo*, means “to cease, rest, refresh.” The former part of the word, *ana*, means “repetition.” (*The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991) We need this kind of rest again and again.

Healthy boundaries are not a mechanism of excuse. They are not a free pass to dishonor or neglect our God-given responsibilities or relationships. That’s why they are called “healthy.” Healthy boundaries exist so we can “go the distance” and take some much needed rests along the way while growing and glorying in the Lord.

### **An Ungrateful People**

We established at the beginning of our lesson that working, ministering, or relating with people can take energy. On page 62, Virelle brings up one particular characteristic common to man (and woman)—an ungrateful heart. If you think today’s culture with all of its electronics and fancy gadgets is making individuals more ungrateful than previous generations, take a look at our previous Bible story.

Read the following passages and summarize the complaint and the solution:

Exodus 15:22–27:

Exodus 16:2–16:

Exodus 17:1–6:

“Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent” (Numbers 11:10). Scripture says there were 600,000 Israelite men in the group. With women and children, Moses was leading over two million people to the Promised Land. Moses cried out to the Lord and even begged to die if this was what he had to tolerate. “I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me” (Numbers 11:14). And what was God’s solution in verse 16? Delegation. God gave compassion to Moses but a curse to the Israelites. He provided everything they needed, but the people continually wanted more.

What does Scripture say the reason was for the curse (Numbers 11:20)?

Would you define yourself as a grateful person? Why or why not?

Why does gratefulness matter so much to God?

### **What about Us?**

We rub shoulders with ungrateful people daily. That doesn’t mean we stop giving or serving.

**Jesus learned to serve, as we must, expecting nothing in return. At times it was disappointing, even for Him.**  
*Meet Me at the Well, p. 64*

Our motivation to give and serve springs from love for Jesus. But as we interact with ungrateful individuals, we are forced to look in the mirror. Do we like what we see?

Ask yourself these hard questions:

- Am I a grateful woman?
- Do others see me as negative, complaining frequently, lacking in contentment, or jealous?

Here is good news: If we are united with Christ, we can have victory and become the grateful women God calls us to be.

Read Philippians 4:11–13.

What did Paul learn (vv. 11–12)?

What was the secret of being content (v. 13)?

Thankful hearts develop when we are dependant upon Christ for strength every day. No matter what our situation, He is the Source for our every need. Gratefulness grows when we turn to God continually in the good times and in our trials.

Read Colossians 1:9–12.

Paul was praying for the Colossians so that they would live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way. What three things did Paul list?

Verse 10:

Verse 11:

Verse 12:

God wants us to have joyful and thankful hearts. Our joy and thanks please Him!  
What can you thank God for today?

Read 1 Timothy 6:6–8.

What did Paul tell Timothy about being thankful?

Now read Ephesians 1:3–14.

What are our spiritual blessings in Christ? How many can you list?

If the desire of our hearts is to be women who radiate joy and thanksgiving, we need to set our hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1). Christ Himself will supply the grace we need to possess these qualities because He is the possessor and giver of joy (John 15:11). Unlike happiness, joy is deeply rooted and cannot be swayed by external circumstances.

List those things that you desire to pass on to the next generation (children, nieces or nephews, grandchildren, those in your sphere of influence). What intentional things will you do to help you accomplish this?

Read Colossians 2:6–7. What are we to overflow with?

Read Colossians 3:15. What are the last three words Paul writes in this verse?

Thirdly, as Christ followers, we are to overflow with thanksgiving. In Colossians 3, giving thanks is under the section entitled “Rules for Holy Living.” Since we have new life in Christ, we are to clothe ourselves with compassion and kindness, gentleness and patience. We are to love like Christ and let peace rule in our hearts. And as believers, we are to be thankful. This is not a suggestion. This is a command. How can we not be thankful? Even in trial and difficulty, a greater picture exists. We have a Father who sits on the throne who calls us His. He holds us and everything else together. When the bottom is dropping out from under us, He is the foundation that doesn’t give way. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13).

Meditate on these thoughts this week. We have a lost world watching us as believers. We have children who are wondering if this faith in Christ stuff really works. Are we living what we say we believe? Are we allowing Christ to permeate us through and through? Are we radiating Him to those around us? Are we being hearers only, or doers of the Word (James 1:22)?

As we close this week, read Hebrews 12:28. When it all comes down to it, having a thankful heart is a heart of worship. It is acknowledging that God is who He says He is: the Great I Am. Let’s spend time this week praying to be thankful women, meditating on Ephesians 1, and worshiping Him daily by telling Him “thank you” often.

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28–30*

*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18*

## Week Five

### Living on the Altar

Read chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

Barbara Johnson, former author and speaker for Women of Faith, tells the story of a woman who stopped at the store to pick up a few things. As the clerk rang up her items, one was missing a price tag. She bellowed over the intercom, “PRICE CHECK IN LANE THIRTEEN. TAMPAX. SUPER SIZE.” As if that wasn’t humiliating enough, the employee in the back of the store apparently thought the clerk said “thumbtacks” instead of “Tampax.” A professional voice responded over the intercom. “DID YOU WANT THE KIND YOU PUSH IN WITH YOUR THUMB OR THE KIND YOU POUND IN WITH A HAMMER?” At that point, everyone in the store came unglued. Complete strangers were holding on to one another because they were laughing so hard. As funny as that would have been to see, I’m sure this lady customer was mortified. We all have had those “Wanna get away?” moments, haven’t we? At times of humiliation, vulnerability, and loss of control, we wish the floor would drop out from beneath us or we could morph into someone else.

Whether comical or serious, unexpected twists and turns occur in life. We like control; we make plans and have every expectation those plans will unfold. But that isn’t what life hands us. Serving as a chaplain at a health care center, I have seen this to be true repeatedly. A husband who made plans to travel with his wife in retirement now spends his days visiting her in the nursing center. A woman, once a nurse caring for the ill, now spends another year in bed being cared for. A couple waiting seventeen years to have their first baby loses it the day before he is due. Life is out of our control. And yet so often, we attempt to walk it alone and keep it all together. However, God doesn’t ask us to have it all together or to be in control. He does ask us to trust Him and surrender to Him daily.

#### Looking at the Altar

In the book of Romans, Paul writes some fabulous truths to believers. He explains to the church in Rome that they were all unrighteous sinners. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world and died for us, taking our sin upon Himself and giving us His righteousness (or “rightness”) before God. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, are deemed free from condemnation, and receive power from the Holy Spirit! Basically, Paul presents the gospel. But when Paul begins chapter 12, he becomes practical. He even brings in language that this audience would understand. He gives them an analogy of an altar and sacrifice.

Read Leviticus 1:1–9. What was the use of the altar in the Old Testament, according to the law?

Skim the headings in Leviticus 2–5. What kinds of offerings did the Israelites present to God?

The altar in the Old Testament was used to present an offering, or sacrifice, to the Lord. It was an expression to God of some kind—to worship, seek forgiveness, obtain physical or spiritual cleansing, or give thanks. Depending on the type of offering, things sacrificed varied anywhere from birds and animals to grain or liquid offerings. A burnt offering in particular was an expression of devotion and signified the total surrender of a worshiper’s heart and life to God.

Read Romans 12:1 and write it below.

Using Webster’s dictionary, define the word “urge.”

Who is Paul urging to offer themselves as living sacrifices?

The word “urge” means to beg or plead. If we think of the word “urgent,” we get a better grasp of the passion and vigor with which Paul was speaking. It is interesting to me that Paul had to beg believers to offer themselves to the Lord. But as a Christ follower and part of God’s church, I have witnessed this hesitancy, even in myself. The altar was there, but I continued to ignore it and walk around it, not even glancing in its direction.

For years, I wrestled with fears of all sorts: fear of failure, insignificance, disapproval, and abandonment. It affected my thoughts, perceptions, speech, and the way I related to people. This fear would manifest in different ways, chiefly by jealousy and comparing myself to others. I was ruled by a paralyzing fear that manifested itself through panic attacks, skewed perceptions, and paranoia. It affected my marriage and my life. One day I woke up to what this fear was doing to me and to my family. I fell to the floor, a crumpled, sobbing mess, and cried out to God. In my spirit I heard Him say, *I have been with you and brought you so far from where you have been, but I can’t take you further unless these chains come off. Look at the altar.*

### **What about Us?**

Just because we have a relationship with Christ doesn’t mean we are perfect. In fact,



being a Christian is admitting the opposite. Jesus, in Matthew 9, says that He came for the sick, not for the healthy. We are in need of a Savior. Everyone has struggles to deal with. For some of us it may be negative thinking, a critical spirit, or a temptation to turn to other things for comfort rather than God. Some of us have been holding a grudge, struggling with fear or jealousy, or walking in false guilt. Whatever it is, we can choose how we deal with it. Will we admit there is a struggle or continue to look the other way?

**One woman in the Bible, a pregnant teenager named Mary, captured my heart with the way she embraced change and trusted God when she might easily have turned away.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 76*

Is there an area of your life in which you are denying a problem exists? Is there something in your heart that you are not dealing with? Have you been avoiding the altar?

Looking at the altar means opening ourselves up to God. It means putting Him back on the throne of our hearts and acknowledging that He is our source of healing and comfort. God has a work to do in us and through us, and is waiting for us to submit to Him and trust Him for the outcome.

What fears keep you from trusting God fully today?

### **Lying on the Altar**

The day I heard God's voice regarding my fear was the day I laid it on the altar. The results were truly amazing. I gained a friend who was once an enemy. God wanted to do a work in each of us for His glory. Freedom comes with surrender.

In Romans 12:1, what has Paul urged believers to do?

Read Genesis 22:1–14.

Recalling the various types of offerings mentioned in Leviticus, which type of offering was Isaac to be?

As mentioned previously, what was the defining characteristic of this type of offering as compared to the others?

In sacrificing Isaac, God asked Abraham to offer up or sacrifice his very heart and life. Besides Isaac being Abraham's only son, how else was Abraham laying down his life in devotion to God (Genesis 15:1–6; 17:1–8, 15–22; 21:12)?

To lay down our lives, our children's lives, our hopes, dreams, and even the promises we know God has made to us can be downright painful. The feeling of losing control can be frightening. To lay ourselves on the altar and die to self is a vulnerable position to be in and yet the best position. On our backs there is no place to look but up. In Genesis 22:2 the word "offer" (KJV) means "to ascend, to mount up, to rise, to grow up." (*The Complete WordStudy Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1994) As we are yielded and surrendered on the altar, there is a growth that takes place. It can be a slow growth, and often we don't see it until we look back. When we are empty of self, dependant on Him, and seeking Him through His Word, the roots of faith begin to sink deeper as God teaches us. We learn the lesson because we are living the lesson. God reveals more about Himself and more about us. Lying on the altar is not the end of life, but the beginning.

Read the following Scriptures. What are some of God's promises to those who surrender?

Philippians 1:6

James 1:2–4

1 Peter 1:6–7

God is growing us up to total devotion to Him. His heart's desire is to make our faith strong and for us to look more like Him. God wants every area of our life, every part of our heart, mouth, mind, hands, and feet all to be used for His purposes. He wants everything that is near and dear to us—our dreams, passions, family, money, and time. He wants everything in us, the best and the rest. Laying ourselves on the altar is losing control, but it moves us from fear to dependence on God.

Read Genesis 22:12. Why did God commend Abraham?

The word “withheld” in the Hebrew means “to refuse, hold back, or hinder.” (*The Complete WordStudy Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1994) God commended Abraham because he held nothing back from the Lord and actually gave God what meant most to him. He did not refuse God's commands and ultimately what God had in store for him. What three words stand out to you in verse 12?

Abraham's heart reflected God's. He, too, in the name of love, was willing to offer His only Son on the altar. However, there was one difference. God provided the lamb for Abraham to sacrifice instead of Isaac. God provided a Lamb that took our place as well, but it was His Son, Jesus Christ. The pain Abraham was spared, God experienced. God's only Son was sacrificed on an altar, but His altar was a cross.

### **What about Us?**

When we submit to God, one of the most difficult things is “the wait.” Have you ever had to wait on God? Describe your experience.

**Perhaps the extended wait births  
the story. Those who learn to sit  
still and wait have something  
amazing worth telling.**  
*Meet Me at the Well, p. 90*

What did you learn or are you learning in “the wait”?

Since looking at the altar, is there anything you would like to lay down today? If so, what?

Where have you felt God wanting to grow you?

Refer back to Romans 12:1. When we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, what are we actually doing?

A spiritual act of worship is one that is not ritualistic or habitual. It is not just going through the motions. It is worship that flows from our hearts and minds, our spirits and souls. It is genuine. Surrendering to God is worship.

List some ways we can surrender to God in practical ways everyday.

How does your perception of surrender change when you think of it as worship?

### **Living on the Altar**

When we have laid our dreams, relationships, bodies, minds, goals, motivations, and our very lives on the altar, what do we do next? We live there. Every morning we can choose to crawl up on the altar and surrender for another day. But in order to live in surrender, we need to bathe in the Word of God.

Read Romans 12:2 and write it out.

We must renew our minds with truth in order to live a surrendered life. Those things that we continue to struggle with can be brought to God's altar every day. What things are we dealing with? The Scriptures bring healing (Ps. 107:20), freedom (John 8:32), and truth (John 17:17). Whatever we are encountering, Scripture provides the strength to leave it on the altar for God to use for His glory. Write out the following Scriptures:

If fear, we can stand on 2 Timothy 1:7.

If self-condemnation, we can look to Romans 8:1

If difficulty surrendering our dreams, we can claim Galatians 2:20.

If trouble relinquishing control, we can remind ourselves of Zechariah 4:6.

**Imagine smelling the aroma waiting for you every day in God's Word. Fresh words just for you. Rise and eat, child. You look hungry.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 83*

### **What about Us?**

What Scriptures for your specific struggles do you need to renew your mind in order to stay surrendered? Write them below.

Surrender is a journey and a constant awareness of needing to be on the altar. When we lay ourselves down and look up, God can work. He can have full access to our hearts and use us for His glory. He can loose our chains and grow us up to total devotion to Him. Losing control can take us from fear to dependence to freedom.

I had a friend who went to be with Jesus in her eighties. Her heart and life revolved around her family, and she was anxious about leaving them. She had lost her husband, whom she called “Dad,” seven years earlier. She expressed some of her concerns to me about a week prior to her death. We prayed together, and the Holy Spirit poured out His peace on her. One week later, her daughter called and said that her mother went home to be with the Lord earlier that morning. She told my husband that they experienced the most wonderful gift prior to her mother taking her last breath. Her mother, who had been resting quietly with her eyes closed, suddenly opened them and said, “Dad . . . Dad . . . is this Heaven? I wanna die, I wanna die!” And with those words, she slipped away from this world. One glance of Heaven and she wanted to go Home. She had laid her worries, fears, and concerns on the altar one week earlier. Her family, her home, her life here was nothing in comparison with where she was headed. With surrender comes great reward.

**Now I am convinced beyond doubt God loves to surprise us with His will, which is always worth waiting for. His plans, no matter how trying, are always good. And His path always leads us home.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 97*

*For you know it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18*

## Week Six

### Hearing His Heart Beat

Read chapters 13, 14, and 15 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

How do you know God? How do you picture Him in your mind? When you hear His name, what do you think? Growing up, many of us may have had a certain perception of God that wasn't necessarily true. To some of us, He was scary. To others, He was dull and boring. Some of us may have viewed Him as a tyrant, wanting perfection from us, and, when we could not deliver, finding joy in smacking us over the head. Some of us may have viewed Him as a God of love who would look the other way when we would do something bad. To a lot of us, God may have been somebody who didn't care about us whatsoever.

Why does it matter so much? The way we know God is foundational—it affects every part of our lives. Our perception of God affects our perception of people, the world, sin, our dreams, our relationships, even of ourselves—in short, everything. Most importantly, it affects our relationship with Him. It is time to discover His heart, who He really is.

Growing up, what was your perception of God? Why?

What is your view of God today? Why?

### Remembering Who We Are

Read Ezekiel 16:1–5.

To grasp a more complete picture of God's heart, it is important to understand who we are without Him—what He has saved us from and what He has saved us to. One picture God gives us is found in Ezekiel. A prophet and priest to Jerusalem, Ezekiel had been appointed by God to give His messages to the Israelites. Jerusalem's inhabitants, beginning with their leaders, had turned their backs on God. They participated in idol worship, child sacrifice, murder, sexual immorality, and injustices of every kind. Jerusalem despised the things of God, and, in a nutshell, had forgotten Him and turned to other things for satisfaction. After they received multiple warnings without repenting, God sent Jerusalem's enemy, Babylon, to take the city captive. Allowing some of the Israelites to remain in Jerusalem, the Babylonians led most of the Israelites back to Babylon, one of those exiles being Ezekiel.



What was Ezekiel's message to the Israelites in verse 3?

Jerusalem was first settled by the Canaanites. When God freed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, He promised them freedom in the Promised Land, which was Canaan. Many tribes lived in Canaan, including the Amorites and Hittites, but God commanded the Israelites to drive them out as they settled the land. However, the Israelites failed to do this, and even made treaties with some of them. What followed was something God had warned His people about and the reason He wanted these pagan tribes destroyed. The Israelites began to be influenced by and intermarry with these tribes and soon began worshipping their false gods. To look back a little further at the ancestry of the Canaanites, read Genesis 9:18–27.

Who was Canaan and what happened to him?

Not only does God remind them of their depraved ancestry and birthplace, but God continues to describe the helpless state in which He found Israel. He compares Israel's spiritual state to a newborn baby tossed into an open field. What descriptive words about this baby come to mind as you read verses 4 and 5?

The standard practices in those days of caring for a newborn were to cut the cord, clean the baby with water, rub it with salt, and then wrap it in cloths. In pagan societies, those things listed in verses 4 and 5 were not unheard of. A baby that was rejected, unwanted, and despised was left to die, exposed to the elements and wild animals. But to the Israelites, such a picture was abhorrent. God used this image to describe their spiritual state.

What do you think God was trying to convey to the Israelites in these five verses?

This message was written to Jerusalem as a reminder, a reality check. God is saying, "This is where you come from. This is who you are apart from Me. This is where I found you." Although God can be specific with His messages, we can take this analogy to heart as well. God's heart for His people does not change. In fact, our ancestry, too, is one of sin and disgrace.

**What about Us?**

What is our ancestral history? A sin nature been passed down from generation to generation ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God (Genesis 3). Think about where God found us. Where were we in our thoughts, our dysfunction, our greed, our wandering? Living for self, putting everything else before God, speaking and believing lies, the list can go on.

Describe your ancestral history or lineage. Where did Christ “find you”?

What does Scripture say we are without Christ? List any descriptive words or phrases:

Ephesians 2:1–3

Romans 6:6

Romans 3:10–18, 23

Jeremiah 17:9

I had instructed my young son that he had to finish his dinner before enjoying chocolate cake at his younger brother’s birthday party. So what did he do? He hid his dinner under the couch! I had not taught him to deceive or lie, but that is what sprang into action first. And so it is with you and me. Without Christ, detestable practices are what come first. Our sin nature is our nature. Apart from Christ, there is nothing good in us.

Can you recall an experience where this truth was made evident to you?

**Realizing Who He Is**

Read Ezekiel 16:6–7.

As we are reminded who we are, we have the privilege of realizing who He is. God is so immense, we cannot begin to describe all of His qualities. However, just from this text alone, we can see some of them. The picture God paints for us in verse 6 is a disturbing one, but His response is the essence of His heart. As this neglected baby kicks about in its blood, God draws near and declares an emphatic “Live!” This word “Live” in the Hebrew means just that: “to live, to enjoy life; to recover, to be well.” But it also means “to restore to life.” (*The Complete Word Study Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1994) God is the God of restoration. He is the God of life!

Write out the following Scriptures:

Romans 4:17

Ezekiel 18:23

2 Peter 3:9

What phrases in Deuteronomy 30:15–20 stand out to you?

Isn't it wonderful to discover God's heart? As you read His Word and discover more of it, draw a small heart beside those Scriptures that portray who He is.

God is in the business of restoring. He is able to give spiritual life to the spiritually dead, hope to the hopeless, freedom to the captive, hunger and thirst to the complacent, strength to the weary. His heart wants to restore and renew us—spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically.

**What about Us?**

Where do you need restoration, a.k.a. “a complete overhaul”?

**That's what I needed: a complete overhaul.  
Nothing less would do. I asked God to renew  
my spirit one room at a time.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 104*

God's heart beats restoration. Is this truth new to you or a reminder? If a reminder, how have you lost sight of God's heart in your circumstances?

Have you been looking to your circumstances rather than Jesus to fulfill you?

How would you respond to Virelle's question on page 104, "Have you forgotten that God gives good gifts to His children, including you?"

Learning to know God's heart fosters trust in His character. Even when we don't understand what He is doing or what He is allowing, we can trust His heart. He is good. What He has for us is far better than anything we could want for ourselves. Do we trust His heart that He wants our best? Do we believe that He desires to shower us with what He has for us? Even though the wait is sometimes grueling, do we trust His timing?

God is the God of restoration and relationship. God blesses when and who He wants to bless. His heart is full of grace and compassion. I can just imagine how delighted He is to lavish us with His love and pour out another blessing. But also with relationship comes responsibility and accountability. We have a responsibility to obey Him. That's another reason discovering His heart is so important. Getting to know someone deepens our relationship, and we respond out of love. Do we always feel like it? No. But love is not a feeling; it's a choice. We choose life every time we obey God.

**I might have shortened my recovery time  
had I remembered two things:  
pray far more expectantly,  
watching for God's answers; and be  
ready to obey Him quickly,  
no matter what He says.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 104*

Pray and obey. Take time now to write a praise to Him for who He is. Feel free to pray honestly to Him, listening for His voice.

Read Ezekiel 16:8–14.

As we read at the beginning of the chapter what God has saved us from, these verses declare what God has saved us to! The heart of God revealed! We, who have a lineage of sin and disgrace and no desirability whatsoever, have been saved from certain death and chosen by the God of the Universe to be His. How does this make you feel?

Is it difficult to embrace this truth? Why or why not?

Read Ruth 3:1–9, 4:9–10, 13. What did it mean if a man spread the corner of his garment over a woman?

Read Genesis 24:1–22, 53. What did Abraham's servant pay as a bride price for Rebekah's hand in marriage to Isaac?

To spread the corner of one's garment over another was symbolic for marriage or protection! "Cover" in the Hebrew means, "to cover for protection, to conceal or hide, to clothe, cover sin, forgive." (*The Complete WordStudy Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1994) God has spread the corner of his garment over us and covered our need, clothed our nakedness, and forgiven our sin. As a bride price was paid for Rebekah in the form of jewelry and fine clothes, God lists the same symbols in verses 9–13. What does it appear that God is saying to us?

God has offered us the invitation to enter into covenant relationship with Him. The one true God, who sits on His throne ruling over all, has gazed upon us and called us His Bride, His Delight. He has paid the bride price for us with His Son's life on the cross—we, who have no desirability whatsoever. From despised to desired, from rejected to royalty. That is the heart of God.

### **Requiring a Bold Faith**

Just like we spend time with our family or friends and come to know their values, likes, dislikes, and overall character, when we spend time with God we learn His as well. God wants to reveal Himself to us, so we can know Him more. The more we discover His heart and character, the more we trust Him. For some of us, including myself, trust can be a difficult thing. But God is one we can trust who will never fail us. His heart is for us. He has surprises to thrill us, lessons to teach us, and, yes, struggles to lead us through. But His heart is never to harm us, only to prove our faith and strengthen us. His desire is for us to depend solely on Him, to trust His heart even when we don't know where He is taking us.

Read Ezekiel 6:9. How does our lack of trust in Him affect God's heart?

Write out Hebrews 11:6.

Our lack of trust sends the message to God, "You are not enough." But it is a bold faith in Him that blesses Him—believing who He is and what He can do, that He stands behind His promises, that He is good no matter what and near when we seek Him wholeheartedly. He is enough.

Write out Jeremiah 29:11–13.

This precious promise was written to the Israelites who were in captivity in Babylon. God had not given up on them even in their most detestable practices, but had good plans for them. He had plans of restoration. They needed to submit, believe, obey, and walk in faith, even if all they saw were the walls of Babylon. God was seeing something much different.

### **What about Us?**

The day was gray and miserably rainy as our airplane took off for Florida. We jostled through the turbulence as we ascended to our appropriate flying altitude. As we lifted above the clouds, I caught my breath. Not a trace of the storm below existed, but every hue of orange and yellow filled the sky atop puffy, white clouds. It was absolutely beautiful. I had a completely different perspective from those on the ground. The sun was shining; they just couldn't see it. Isn't that the way life is? Where we are limited in our vision, God can see it all. He has asked us to trust Him, to let Him lead us. There is hope on the horizon.

Being honest, do you really trust the heart of God? Why or why not?

How does Ezekiel 6 and Hebrews 11 impact you? Have you ever realized the magnitude of how God is affected by our response?

Seven months ago, my husband resigned from his job, not on a whim, but because he sensed the Lord urging him to do so. Some people looked at us cross-eyed because my husband didn't have anything else lined up before he quit. This behavior isn't "normal." But it has truly been an adventure with God. There have been some rough spots along the way, but God had gifted us with His peace from the very beginning of the journey. We prayed, believed, cried, and prayed some more. We saw God closing one door after another as we stepped back and allowed Him to have full control. Then one day God opened a door and we walked through. The potential and opportunity that lies ahead is blowing us away. Our faith in Him, in what He can do, in how He speaks, in how He leads, has grown. God is not asking us to have a "normal" kind of faith, but a faith that is based on who He is.

Have you sensed God urging you to step out with a bold faith? If so, how?

**Do you have difficulty believing God has good plans for you too? For you personally? Try this: Pray honestly, trust boldly, and live ready to obey the next prompting of the Holy Spirit. I might add, brace yourself. This may be a great ride.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 116*

Continue to discover the heart of God through His Word. Write out Jeremiah 29:11–13 on an index card and meditate on it throughout the week. Believe it. It's straight from His heart.

*Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's! The Lord gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly. He revealed His character to Moses and His deeds to the people of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; He does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For His unfailing love toward those who fear Him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to His children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him. . . . But the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear Him. His salvation extends to the children's children of those who are faithful to His covenant, of those who obey His commandments!*

*Psalms 103 (NLT)*

The above passage reveals more of the heart of God. Write a prayer below; tell Him about His attributes that speak to you specifically. How will they enable you to trust Him more?



## Week Seven

### **Purpose in the Pruning**

Read chapters 16 and 17 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

My friend's son-in-law was recently diagnosed with cancer. He periodically reports through email his week's events, from how he fared through chemotherapy treatments to household or social activities. But what makes his emails meaningful is what God has revealed to him along the way. His motto for this season rings clear: "I will not ask God why, but rather, what are You teaching me?" One thing is certain: God is doing an amazing work in this man. He is walking through a trial of immeasurable proportions, yet is growing closer to God like never before and proclaiming His goodness to all who are watching.

Trials are part of life. We can expect them. They can be anything from illness to a difficult relationship, from short-lived to chronic, external circumstance to internal wrestling. But how do we respond when they come? Depending on our personality, we may internalize the problem so that it consumes us with worry. Others may process the trial by talking about it to a trusted friend or family member. Some of us might run directly to the Word of God and pray, while others may point the finger at God and become angry. Or, all of the above!

When you face a trial, how do you respond?

When testing or trials come, we can easily lose sight of the big picture. But in the trial God wants us to trust His heart. He will never desert His children. It is not who He is. We may not understand what He is doing, but we can trust He is doing something good. The lesson may not be seen for days, months, or even years, but we can know there is purpose in the pruning.

### **Respond with Joy**

Read James 1:1–4.

James, the half-brother of Jesus and author of the book of James, wrote to the Jewish Christians that were scattered among various nations. James was encouraging these Christians as they experienced trials and persecution.

What two words define how God wants us to respond to trials (v. 2)?

I never understood this verse. At one time I thought it was some super-spiritual concept that Christians were supposed to do, but everyone knew it was pretty much short of

impossible. Pure joy? There is no way. But several years ago as I studied the book of James, I discovered something that hit me right between the eyes—and went straight to my heart.

The word *trial* in the Greek means “a temptation or testing. The meaning depends on the source of the trial. If it is God, the trial is for the purpose of proving someone and *never* (emphasis mine) for the purpose of causing him to fall. If it is the devil, then it is for the purpose of causing one to fall.” (*The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991)

When we discover God’s intent to see us through, no matter what, we find hope. Even when trials originate from our enemy, and we are clinging to God with faithful and obedient hearts, God will redeem what Satan meant for harm. It may not always be in the way or time frame we desire, but it is always far better than what we could have imagined. No one likes to experience trials, and to celebrate with eyes on the hardship itself is difficult. But in light of this definition, when we keep our eyes on Jesus, we can rejoice in the motivation behind the trial, in the love of the One who is driving it. Remember? We can trust His heart. Unlike Satan, who is out to kill us, God is out to prove our faith and make us strong. His desire is to make us look more and more like Him. That is why we are to respond with pure joy.

**Jesus ran His earthly race for the joy on His Father’s face. He kept His eye on heaven. We can do the same thing He did. “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). Jesus finished His race with joy. So can we.**

*Meet Me at the Well*, pp. 127–128

James emphasizes this in verse three. What are we developing as our faith is tested in trials?

The word *perseverance* in the Greek is *hupomone*. It means “patience, endurance as to things or circumstances. *Hupomone* is associated with hope and refers to the quality that

does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial.” (*The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991) God is working in us, testing, proving, and growing our faith so that we develop a resolve that will not give up or give in to hardship. God’s heart is for us! When digging a little deeper and breaking apart the word *hupomone*, *hupo* meaning “under” and *mone* meaning “abide,” we discover a vital message. It is when we abide under, dwell with, and remain in Jesus that we can persevere. Read John 15:4.

If abiding or remaining in Christ is essential to persevere through trials, how are we to do that? Look up the following Scriptures. Write how each verse speaks to you as to how you can abide.

John 6:56

1 John 4:15

John 15:7

1 John 2:24

1 John 3:24

### **What about Us?**

What has been one of your greatest trials?

Who or what enabled you to get through it?

In walking through this trial, what were some of the ways you saw the handprints of God?

How does the evidence of God's Presence help you abide in Christ?

What verse means the most to you at times like this?

### **Respond with Obedience**

Return to James 1:4. What is the value of perseverance?

The bottom line is God is growing each of us to maturity through all sorts of challenges, trials, and learning curves in life. We imagine there is the same "bar" we all must reach, and are quick to judge others if we don't see them meeting our perceived standard. Not so. God has a plan for each of us to become like His Son. Only He can do that as we walk with Christ through each trial, finding He is enough in any difficulty. His grace sustains us, His power carries us, and His love fills us when we would fail on our own.

**Who would have guessed that God was proving the faithfulness of Job to all of heaven? How can we know His purpose in our suffering, or another's either? We can't.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 122*

God may go about growing us up differently, but His goal is the same. What do you think He is aiming for in your life?

Read James 1:22–25. Write out verse 22.

According to these Scripture verses, not only does obedience grow us, but what does it show others?

John 15:5–8, 15–16

1 John 3:6, 9–10, 18

The difference between simply knowing and actively growing in Christ is obedience. It is the key to freedom and fruit bearing, even in trials. Obedience shows the world that we belong to Christ and that in Him, life can not only work, but contain joy and hope. Things that the world deems impossible—loving those most difficult, obtaining victory over habitual sin, forgiving others, living in joy and peace when all seems bleak—become possible for the believer. With obedience comes maturity. With obedience comes reward.

### **What about Us?**

Have you experienced growth in your life from a trial? If so, in what ways?

What did you learn about obeying God in the midst of it?

As you have watched others go through trials, what positive or negative things have you learned from them?

What are some rewards obedience brings?

### **Respond with Prayer**

Read James 1:5–8.

Trials have the tendency to throw us into upheaval, at least initially. We can feel lost, aimless, and desire direction. What are we to do according to verse five?

What phrase in verse five describes the heart of God, even in trials?

What is James' warning to those who ask God for wisdom (v. 6)?

List words or phrases to describe the person who asks God for wisdom and then doubts (vv. 6–8).

### **What about Doubt?**

As humans, we doubt. We have questions, concerns, and anxieties. Doubt is a normal feeling and often experienced in life, especially in trials. However, Scripture says that when we turn to God and ask Him for wisdom and then doubt, we are unstable in all that we do. We are double-minded and should not expect anything from Him. Pretty sobering. What does all that mean? The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2003) describes being double-minded as “a lack of purity of heart or a lack of absolute trust in God. The term literally means ‘of two minds or souls.’ It describes one who is trusting in God while also trusting in something else, such as self or the world. . . .He is one who is wavering between asking God in faith and not believing God will or can answer. He may also be one who asks God yet resorts to his own wisdom instead of that which God provides.”

When we learn more and more of who God is, we learn that He is trustworthy. God is able and willing to help us. He desires to help us because He has amazing things He wants to teach us, growing us up in His way—the best way. But more than anything, He

wants our hearts to be solely and undividedly His. Anything less is second best. In the trial, God can be trusted. His heart is for us. He wants ours to be for Him.

Read Deuteronomy 7:7–8a. What does this verse tell us about God?

Read Colossians 3:1. How are we to respond to Him?

God has set His affections on us. We are to set ours on Him. We may not always understand what He is doing, but we can get through difficult times when we know He loves us. Our prayer of faith needs to be centered not on our circumstances, not on others' perspectives, not in the specific words we pray, but in our God and who He is.

### **What about Us?**

Have you ever prayed for wisdom? If so, what happened?

How has that led you toward maturity in Christ?

**Seasons of sorrow will come. Exhaustion will come, and our fruitful life may seem to dry up and blow away. But it won't. My confidence in God has zoomed tenfold now. When locusts devour, God calls it pruning, and He doubles the fruit we once had.**

*Meet Me at the Well*, p. 121

Trials can be difficult, and yet, studying what we have this week, we receive a much broader perspective. God's heart for His children is once again revealed. He loves us so much He allows into our lives that which will grow us and make us strong—never harming us, only proving us. Through trials, Jesus teaches us how to persevere, reminding us that He is there every step of the way, holding us up as we abide in Him. He teaches us obedience so we can bear fruit and radiate Him to the world—a world dying to

know Him. Through trials, God teaches us what it is to trust and love Him with undivided hearts, never failing to show us the depths of His love the entire way. There is purpose in the pruning.

*Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever. So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. Hebrews 10:32–36 (NLT)*

*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12*

*As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him. Psalm 18:30*



## Week Eight

### Joyful

Read chapters 18 and 19 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

Laughter is one of my favorite things in the world, the only contagious thing I don't mind catching. Yet in so many paintings of Jesus, He is portrayed as somber and stoic. But on my kitchen counter is Jack Jewell's *The Risen Christ by the Sea*. This rendering pictures Him holding a fishing net, laughing.

God invented laughter. You can't tell me Jesus didn't have a fabulous sense of humor and know how to belly laugh. I can picture Him sitting with His disciples on the beach around the fire discussing their day of ministry, when someone says something funny and the whole group breaks up. Of course there was laughter and joy. After all, the disciples were hanging out with the One who created it.

**Jesus knew how to live, laugh, tell a great story, and keep people begging for more. After all, why shouldn't He? The Author of Life invented laughter as well as truth. They are compatible. It's another good and perfect gift we often ignore.**

*Meet Me at the Well*, p. 132

#### A Joyful God

How many of us grew up thinking God was a boring killjoy? Thankfully, we were wrong. When we look into the heart of God, we find His unmistakable joy.

Look up the following Scriptures. What does each passage tell you about God?

Isaiah 65:17–19

Luke 10:21

Luke 15:4–7, 8–10, 11–32

Isaiah 62:5

John 15:11

John 17:13

What kind of joy fills the heart of God? It is more than joy of good cheer and a glad heart; it is an exuberant joy. In Isaiah 65, the word *rejoice* means to spin around. God rejoices over us so exuberantly, He expresses it outwardly. Jesus, in Luke 10:21, expresses His joy in His Father by leaping and skipping! The word *joy* in this text means “to exult, leap for joy, to show one’s joy by leaping and skipping denoting excessive or ecstatic joy and delight.” (*The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991) We have a God who creates unlimited joy, expresses it outwardly and openly, and desires for His people to experience it as well. Because we bear His image, God has designed us to have the full measure of His joy. Our God celebrates and delights in His people and throws a party when the lost are found!

One of the best gifts God has ever given me is my husband. I have never laughed with anyone else as I have with him. He keeps me looking at things from a positive perspective, from a lighter and more humorous side. As my children get older, I have discovered they too have a wonderful sense of humor much like their father, and I love it. One of my favorite memories of my mother is her laughter. She had one of those hearty “throw your head back and let it go” kind of laugh that was contagious. People who are joy-filled are attractive and magnetic. What an opportunity—to live in laughter, love, and joy every day!

According to these verses, who appoints laughter at specific times?

Job 8:21

Luke 6:21

Ecclesiastes 3:4

Read Psalm 126:2–3. Why were the people laughing and celebrating?

### **What about Us?**

How would you rate yourself on average on the joy scale, “1” being no joy, “10” being exuberantly joyful?

Have you ever considered God to be joyful? To the point of leaping? How does this impact you?

What makes you laugh? Who makes you laugh?

I have a friend who makes me laugh. She is an absolute delight, adventurous with just about anything. One weekend we went out of town with another friend. She brought along fake eyelashes and wanted us to put them on for dinner. After dinner we headed back to the hotel, where the concierge struck up a conversation with me. As we talked, one set of my eyelashes began to fall off. Clueless, I continued the conversation while my friends howled over in the corner. Whether shared with our families or friends, or alone, laughter does something for us. It truly is the best medicine.

What is one of your funniest memories? Take time to share your story with those in your study group. It will give everyone a good laugh!

Do you laugh regularly? If not, why not?

“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy” (Psalm 126:3). What things has God done for you that have filled you with joy?

### **A Joyful Fellowship**

As a chaplain, every morning I have the privilege to meet several friends in their eighties at a retirement center for a time of prayer. They have shown me the importance of

walking this journey of faith together. As we've shared, laughed, and asked each other questions, I've sensed myself in the throne room of God. These wonderful friends have propelled my faith to grow even more, and they are fun to be around.

What does Proverbs 27:17 tell us Christian fellowship does?

In Philippians 4:1, how does Paul refer to his friends, his brothers and sisters in Christ?

According to Galatians 5:22, what qualities identify a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit?

Read Galatians 5:16–17, 25–26. What do these verses infer?

**Laughter builds a bridge to another's heart and  
opens the door to God's love.**

*Meet Me at the Well*, p. 133

Has anyone ever asked you why you are so happy? People notice joy. How can they not? Joy is a gift from God, and, like everything else He gives, it is up to us to unwrap the gift and use it. It is no surprise that when we accept the gift God has given and put it to use, it will honor God, reveal Him to the world, and benefit others. Joyful people attract others, believers and unbelievers alike.

However, there are things that can rob us of our joy. According to Galatians 4:8–10, 15, and Psalm 51, what are some of those things?

Our sin can rob us of joy. Embracing again those things from which we broke free (as the Galatians did with legalism), sinning blatantly as David did, or harboring a critical or unforgiving spirit, jealousy, or bitterness, will zap our joy in an instant. Where sin

harbors, joy cannot abide. John 15:10–11 reminds us that joy can be complete in us when we are obedient. That is crucial.

Circumstances and people can also steal our joy, but only if we allow them to. Nehemiah and Paul are wonderful examples of not allowing others to distract us from God’s calling and steal our joy in the process. Nehemiah’s enemies were jealous and malicious. They felt threatened by what God was doing in their midst. Every time they attempted to discourage him, he turned away from them and turned to the Lord. Because of Nehemiah’s faith in God and his obedient response to his enemies’ attempt at joy-robbing, his task for the Lord was completed and thousands benefited from it. (For Nehemiah’s story, read Nehemiah chapters 4 and 6.)

What does 2 Corinthians 7:4 say about Paul’s joy?

What was he facing (v. 5)?

Who was the source of his comfort and whom did He send (vv. 6–7)?

Joy cannot be quenched by trouble, and in those times of difficulty God can choose to send us friends to comfort and encourage. Have you ever invited God to use you to bring encouragement to someone?

### **What about Us?**

Several years ago, I felt very alone in my faith walk. I didn’t have many girlfriends whom I could really connect with and confide in. I remember going on a walk and praying that God would bring girlfriends into my life who wanted to know Him more. Sure enough, not too long after that, God introduced me to a brand new group of ladies. These ladies, with whom I now serve in ministry, love the Lord and desire to grow in Him more and more. God created us for relationship. Friends never take His place in our lives, but He knows we can’t walk this path alone. How like Him to give us others “with skin on” to do this thing together.

Do you have friends with whom you can share openly and pray? Friends you are walking with in your journey of faith? Who are they?

If not, take this time to pray for them. What kind of friends do you need to help you along?

Have you even seen a flock of geese flying in a “V” formation? The lead goose breaks the headwind for the others. When it becomes tired, it switches with another goose. Therefore, the flock doesn’t have to stop but can continue on to their destination. When one goose gets injured or becomes sick, it will drop to the ground below, but not alone. One or two other geese will accompany it until it becomes well. The next time you hear their annoying, loud honking overhead, remember that honking is their encouragement for one another to keep pressing on. They stick together no matter what and encourage each other the entire way.

What kind of a friend are you? Is there someone you need to come alongside and encourage or “drop to the ground with”?

What does Christian fellowship accomplish for you and others according to Hebrews 10:23–25?

When someone or something tries to steal your joy, how do you respond?

There can be various reasons we may feel joyless. The reason may be physical, such as depression or a health problem that needs to be addressed by a doctor. The reason may be spiritual. Let’s examine our hearts and minds and confess any disobedience that may be impeding our joy. However, if it’s simply that we have allowed circumstances, Satan, or others to steal our joy, then let’s pray for God to restore it (Psalm 51:12, Psalm 86:4, Nehemiah 12:43). Just as we pray for an increased faith or a thankful heart, we want to grow and bear the fruit of joy.

Write out a prayer of confession or petition and ask God to fill your heart with joy.

## **A Joyful Rest**

I have always been a “doer,” very driven and goal-oriented, which serves me well—at times. However, these qualities have also been a detriment to me. I believe in the need for rest, but to regularly make it a reality? This is where I fail. And I know I’m not alone. As women, we often carry a lot of responsibility. Sometimes we need to excise some of the good things in order to do what is best. But what if we are in a season in which that just isn’t possible?

List those good things that crowd out the best things in your life.

How did Jesus do it? Jesus rested when He needed to, taking the solace He needed for renewal. He pursued His heavenly Father in prayer and communion for emotional and spiritual rest. He enjoyed physical rest even in a rocking boat during a storm! In the midst of peril, He was at peace. In Mark 6, Jesus took His disciples to a quiet place, where He encouraged them to eat and get some rest.

Rest is essential because God said so and Jesus did so. Why, then, does resting make us feel guilty? God knows we need regular times of joyful rest—the kind that benefits the body, mind, soul, and spirit.

Read Matthew 11:28–30.

Who is to go to the Lord for rest?

What different kinds of rest do these verses imply the Lord gives?

Although the word *rest* in verse 28 means refreshment or taking ease, in verse 29 it means to pause from work or toil, and has the connotation of doing this again and again. Jesus says we can have the refreshment we need when we come to Him. When we are yoked with Him, we can stop as He did and rest in the shadow of His wings without guilt or worry. And we can do it again and again. He won’t tire of us. He won’t turn us away. He wants and welcomes us to rest in Him spiritually, mentally, physically, and emotionally.

**Jesus found rest in an inner posture of submission to His heavenly Father, a poised state of body, mind, and soul in balanced oneness with His purposes.**

*Meet Me at the Well*, p. 140

Life had been spinning out of control. I mean crazy, unhealthy, out of control. We had a full weekend on top of a jam-packed several weeks. The calendar was crowded with even more plans that evening. My husband and boys went, but I finally said enough. I stayed home and crawled into bed at 8 p.m. I didn't turn on the television. I didn't read. I just lay there. I can honestly say it was a no-guilt, joyful rest. My heart didn't feel guilty; my mind didn't conjure up thoughts of what I needed to get up to do. My body was relaxed, and my spirit was quiet. I felt like God was saying, "You need this. Enjoy it. Not only is this OK, this is good."

Read Zephaniah 3:17. What phrases stand out to you?

The Lord quiets us with His love. He holds us in peace, with no words to utter, just a steady presence of Himself. He rejoices—spins and dances—over us with singing. He offers joyful rest.

### **What about Us?**

Where do you struggle most with the need for rest: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or all of the above?

As you look to Jesus' example of resting, what methods do you long to imitate (quiet times with the Father, retreats, naps, encouraging others in rest, others)?

What does it mean to you to have God's constant invitation and welcome to stop and rest with Him as our refuge, again and again?

Read Isaiah 30:15 and Psalm 46:10. What are some simple and practical ways you can practice the joyful rest described in these verses?



A woman who laughs and delights in the Lord is priceless. A woman who laughs with her family and friends is a picture those closest to her will not forget. A woman full of joy and a love for the Lord will leave an unfading legacy to her natural and spiritual children that will leave a lasting impact. I have visited with many older women, and I have learned that attitude is everything and attitude is a choice. I want to live well, love well, and laugh often. I want to influence others with the joy of Jesus Christ. What about you?

*I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! John 15:11 (NLT)*

*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.  
Proverbs 17:22*

*But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.  
Psalm 68:3*

*My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.  
Psalm 131:1-2*

## Week Nine

### **Begging for More**

Read chapters 20 and 21 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

God is in the business of making things new and beautiful. Not only will He make new heavens and a new earth and give us new bodies one day, but He has already begun the work of transforming us into something beautiful to reflect His glory. You are His handiwork, His work of art, His masterpiece.

When a potter takes a lifeless, brown hunk of clay, he places it on his potter's wheel to mold it into shape. As the wheel turns, he sprinkles water on the clay and uses delicate instruments to hollow it out and scrape off excess clay. Gently but firmly, he fashions and forms the clay exactly how he wants it. Soon the piece reflects the potter's plan and heart. And so it is with you and me. God, the Master Potter, is making us into something beautiful according to His plan.

What is the truth found in Philippians 1:6?

### **Crying Out**

Read Mark 10:46–48.

Bartimaeus was a blind beggar living in the city of Jericho. Like others who were handicapped, he had no way to earn a living. Begging meant living off the goodness of others, “earnestly asking” them for help.

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, what did he do (v. 47)?

Bartimaeus knew who Jesus was. He called Him, “Jesus, Son of David,” a title that referred to the Messiah. As Jesus passed by, Bartimaeus set his “sight” on what Jesus alone could give. Even though he lived in darkness, he recognized the Source of Light and earnestly asked Jesus for help.

Read John 9:5. Who does Jesus say He is?

As Bartimaeus cried out for Jesus' attention, the crowd scolded him to be quiet. Bartimaeus didn't care. His need was so desperate, he shouted even louder. In your opinion, why was his need so great?

What drives people to seek Jesus? What drove you to Him?

Can you think of others in Scripture who were compelled to seek Jesus? For more examples, read the following accounts.

Mark 2:1–12

Luke 8:40–56

What is the common theme that led them to Jesus?

### **What about Us?**

We are desperate people with desperate needs. Whether we are at the end of ourselves, experiencing “heat” in a trial, or facing overwhelming circumstances, we all need Jesus. What a gift He gives us when we realize the need, the hunger, and the dryness! What needs face you today? List them below.

**No crucible feels good. They all hurt. But when we think God has looked away, He hasn't. He's using the heat to burn out the dross and cast us into His image. What a privilege. A little more polishing here and there, and you and I will reflect who God really is without even knowing it. . . Because after the crucible the really great part comes: we are once again filled with joy over what God has done in our lives. He's creating beauty we never could have imagined.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 149*

Have you been begging, earnestly asking, or seeking from others that which you need to be seeking God for?

As I thought about the possibility of Bartimaeus' refusal to cry out, I think of my own. Jesus is waiting for me to cry out to Him. How many times has He walked by me and I have kept quiet? Have you been "too appropriate" in your faith walk? Is your need desperate enough to make you cry out loud to Jesus for help and healing? Write a prayer to Jesus below, crying out to Him about your needs today.

## **Calling Us Forward**

Read Mark 10:49–50.

When Jesus heard Bartimaeus calling, what happened next?

What did Jesus invite him to do?

A small detail in this passage is often overlooked: Bartimaeus threw his cloak aside when he ran to Jesus. I discovered through a word study that this type of cloak or outer garment was often large enough to sleep in. These night coverings, worn by travelers, were not to be loaned out. Along similar lines, what does Deuteronomy 24:13 command?

Interesting, then, how flippantly Bartimaeus threw aside his cloak, something so important to his comfort and survival on cold nights. Bartimaeus' need was so immense, the potential of his healing so real, and the Healer Himself was beckoning him to come. Something once so important, a symbol and reminder of his overwhelming need, was now thrown to the side to embrace the exciting potential of something new. Is God calling us to do something similar?

In your opinion, why did Jesus call Bartimaeus forward instead of approaching him?

## **What about Us?**

Jesus wants us to “own” our need by stepping forward to the One who can fulfill it—Himself. In stepping forward, we declare our need and demonstrate our faith. By doing so, we make a statement to God and ourselves, but also to those watching. To watch someone take a step of faith and see what God does often increases ours. Stepping forward in faith is part of our transformation process.

How have you felt Jesus calling you to step forward? How so?

Who might be influenced by your faith journey?

In what ways do you feel God is transforming/growing you?

## **Confessing Our Need**

Read Mark 10:51–52.

What question did Jesus ask Bartimaeus in verse 51?

If Jesus was all-knowing, why did He ask Bartimaeus to verbalize it?

What was Bartimaeus' response?

Jesus already knew the desire and motives of Bartimaeus' heart, but Bartimaeus backed it up by his bold act of faith in crying out, stepping out, and now speaking out. Bartimaeus was taking action in every way. He was begging for more.

Desperate needs drive us to Jesus. But desperate needs don't necessarily keep us there. Read Luke 17:11–19. What was so disheartening to Jesus?

Those who fall in love with Jesus are those who not only acknowledge their need but the depth of it as well. Not only do they grasp the immensity of it, but discover that Jesus is far bigger. Read Luke 7:36–50. How does Scripture describe this woman in verse 37?

How do the woman's actions show us that she knew the depth of her sin and the heart of her Savior?

What is Jesus' point in verse 47?

What does Jesus say saves her in verse 50?

This woman had experienced a cavernous need for who knows how long. And when Jesus came along and offered her forgiveness and new life, nothing but love, gratitude, and devotion spilled forth. Faith saved her. She had begged for more and fallen in love.

### **What about Us?**

Like Bartimaeus, we can live but not truly see. That is, not until we beg for more. Just as Bartimaeus stepped forward and asked Jesus for sight, so we too can come before Him and ask for new eyes—eyes that see Him around us, eyes that see people the way He does. We can ask Him for a new heart—one that loves Him with passion and vibrancy. We can ask Him to give us a heart that falls head over heels in love with Him! We can ask him to give us ears that hear Him better, a spirit that perceives His Spirit more sensitively. We can ask Him for “next level” living—a faith that is growing and resting in Him more and more. We can ask Him for all these things, but what it simply comes down to is that we want more of Jesus.

**What we are really asking for is Christ Himself, for His fullness in our life. We never stop needing more of Jesus.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 153*

How have you been living but not truly seeing? Do you want to beg for more in your relationship with Jesus?

How are you like the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears? Have you recognized the depth of your need and that He is far bigger than you once knew?

We have been forgiven much! Pour out your heart before the Lord and ask Him for more. Write out your prayer in the space below.

Oh, God, we want to fall in love with You. Jesus, we are begging for more. Make us into something new.

*'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* Mark 12:30

*Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. 1 Peter 1:3–7 (NLT)*

*. . . being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus . . . And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:6, 9–11*



## A New Name

Read chapters 22 and 23 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

### Steeped in Lies

There was a time I had no idea who I was. I grew up in a home where there was little security and stability. Unhealthy dynamics and volatile relationships created consistent chaos and unrest. For various reasons I adopted the mindset that to feel significant, I needed to please and perform. When I did well and received positive feedback, I felt significant. When I did not, I was crushed. Because my identity was based on what others thought of me, my worth hung in the balance each new day. It was years before I discovered the identity I embraced had been steeped in lies.

The world, our jobs, other people, circumstances all attempt to give us names. Those names can last for years. Depending on the situation, we can adopt names such as “rejected,” “worthless,” “guilty,” or “unlovable.” It is time to discover our true identity in Christ, one that Jesus died to give us.

Read Isaiah 61:1–10.

In these verses, Isaiah prophesied about what the Messiah would do for His people. Once again the recipient of these promises was Jerusalem, but we as God’s people can take these promises to heart as well. God’s heart for His people does not change.

List those things from Isaiah 61 that Jesus was sent for:

Of all these promises, which one speaks to you the most? Why?

Satan would like nothing better than to bind us in lies, but Christ came to set us free and give us life. Read John 10:10. What does Jesus tell us here?

**What about Us?**

What formed your identity as a child?

How do you define yourself today? Is it what you do for a living, who your children or parents are, whether you're single or married, what others think of you, or your successes or failures?

What situations or experiences have "named" you?

What names have you allowed others or the world to give you?

God wants us to know our true identity is in Christ. The Word of God is life-giving and life-changing truth. It was this truth that turned my world around. When I began to discover the heart of God for His people, how He saw me, and who He called me, my life was never the same. And it was all because of Jesus and what He did on the cross. Even though at times I continue to struggle with Satan's lies, God has unlocked the chains which bound me. He will do the same for you.

### **Standing in Truth**

As we move from being steeped in lies to standing in truth, the good news is that God is in the name-changing business! Names in Bible times expressed the essence of who people were, their character or nature. Names might even express hopes for the child's future. However, sometimes names were changed when one's character or destiny was transformed. List some individuals who experienced name changes throughout Scripture.

For more ideas see the following:

Genesis 32:28

Genesis 17:5–7, 15–16

Matthew 9:9 as compared to Mark 2:14

Matthew 16:17–18

With these name changes came God's blessings, promises, callings, or changes in life course. Jacob, meaning "he cheats or supplants," was changed to Israel, meaning "God heals." From him came twelve sons who would form the nation of Israel. Abram, meaning "father is exalted," was changed to Abraham, "father of a multitude." Sarai was renamed Sarah, both names meaning "princess," but the alteration brought a blessing and promise to be the mother of nations. Levi, hated tax collector, transformed to disciple of Jesus as Matthew. Simon, after his confession of Christ, was changed to Peter the "rock" (*Holman Illus. Bible Dictionary*, 2003). We don't know the names of the adulterous woman or the Samaritan woman at the well, but we do know that just by being in the presence of Jesus and experiencing His grace, their lives were forever changed.

Read Isaiah 62:2–5. God is calling us by new names as well. What are some of these names in this text and in the following passages?

Matthew 5:13–14

John 15:15–16

Romans 8:1–2

1 Corinthians 3:16

2 Corinthians 5:17

These are only some of the names God calls us when we confess Jesus as Lord! There are many more found in His Word.

### **What about Us?**

On polling women in my life, I found our needs tend to fall into four categories:

1. We want to feel significant and valued, that we are important and making a difference.
2. We want to feel accepted.
3. We yearn to feel beautiful or desired.
4. We long to be unconditionally loved.

Of these four needs, which would you place first in your life? Is this need being fully met?

If you are looking to others to meet them, then your answer is probably “no.” No human being is capable of meeting them all. Only God can do that. It’s no surprise then that Scripture addresses each one of these needs.

### Significance

**Because we live in the anteroom of heaven, it’s hard to imagine others as God sees them. Do you ever wonder what God sees when He looks at you? If you are His child, then your sins are forgiven, paid in full at the cross. That means God sees you with the righteousness of Christ. Imagine that!**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 163*

On a scale from 1–10, how would you rate your need for significance?

When we are battling feelings of little worth, Jesus offers us true significance. Read Isaiah 61:3,10. What do crowns and robes infer?

To *bestow* (v. 3) means “to establish a new relationship, to bring about change, to set aside something for special purposes.” (*The Complete WordStudy Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1994) God has called us to royalty.

Read Ephesians 2:10.

Who does Scripture say you are?

What are you created to do?

Who determines when these things take place?

Talk about significance, God had you in mind before the creation of the world! You are His workmanship, His work of art! You were created to do things no one else can do for His kingdom.

Read Psalm 149:4. *Delight* means “to take pleasure in, to be pleased with, especially in connection with paying off a debt.” (*The Complete WordStudy Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1994) When Jesus died for us on the cross, He took our sin and gave us His righteousness, His right standing before God. He was the perfect sacrifice for the world

for all time! When God looks at those who have a personal relationship with Him, He declares them as righteous! God takes delight in you. Have you ever had anyone call you a delight? God calls you that all the time.

### **Acceptance**

On a scale from 1–10, how would you rate your need for acceptance?

Those of us who have struggled with rejection or abandonment can be comforted with the truth that God never leaves us nor turns His back on us. He is faithful to accept us with open arms when we look to Jesus. What do the following verses say to you?

Ephesians 1:4

1 Peter 2:9–10

Isaiah 41:9

The word *chosen* means “to select, love, to be pleasing, to be especially chosen.” (*The Complete WordStudy Old Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1994) How does it feel to be “especially chosen” by God?

Psalm 27:10

Which Scripture means the most to you? Why?

Colossians 1:21–22 contains amazing truth. It proclaims that we who were once enemies of God have now been reconciled to Him through Christ’s death. We are now holy in God’s sight, without blemish and free from accusation. With Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we have been declared innocent! Jesus bought our freedom. Thank you, Lord!

### **Beautiful**

On a scale from 1–10, how would you rate your need to feel beautiful or desired?

It doesn’t take much for a woman’s self esteem to plummet living in a culture with a skewed perspective of beauty. Still, every woman wants to feel she is special, longed for, and the object of another’s affection. Our God is the ultimate Lover of our souls.

Read Psalm 45:11. What word describes the king’s response to the princess?

Song of Songs portrays a husband’s and wife’s love for one another; however, the meaning of this book goes far deeper. This book may also be interpreted as the love between Christ and His Bride. Read Song of Songs 2:4 and 4:9–10.

How do these verses make you feel?

God loves you and is enthralled, captivated with your beauty. You have stolen His heart, and your love delights Him. He has made public the amazing love He has lavished on you. His banner over you is love.

Despite our limitations and the “ugliness” of our sin, Christ’s sacrifice and victory has made us beautiful in His eyes.

### **Unconditionally Loved**

On a scale from 1–10, how would you rate your need to be unconditionally loved?

Many of us have experienced performance-based love and have loved others the same way. Past hurts result in trust issues. But God loves us perfectly. Everything He does is done in love. Even in pouring out His wrath upon His enemies, there is mercy. We can trust His love—there are no flaws or cracks in it. His love is so strong, it never fails.

Read the following verses and list what each one tells you about God’s love:

Jeremiah 31:3

Romans 8:38

Deuteronomy 7:6–8

John 17:23

Which verse speaks to you the most?

My car was in the long line of cars behind the stopped school bus. All of us who were in a hurry to get to work waited impatiently as we fixated on the red blinking lights of the bus. Out of my periphery, I saw a small boy, probably five or six years of age, running as fast as he could from his house down the long lane toward the waiting school bus. Instantly, my impatience melted and my eyes welled up with tears. My heart went out to

him as I saw how hard he was running, how little he was, and the fact that he needed to catch that bus. He was getting tired as his pace slowed, and he still had a ways to go. I was tempted to get out of my van and begin cheering for him, encouraging him to keep going, and reassure him of his progress. I refrained, but it was at that moment I sensed the Lord speaking to me that His heart feels this same way for me all the time. As we run this race called life, God is cheering us on as we run toward Him. We may get tired and our pace may slow. We may even fall down and get hurt. But God keeps on cheering us on. As we experience hurt, it's easy to imagine His eyes brimming with tears, too. Jeremiah 31:3 says His love is everlasting and He has drawn us, led us along, and cheered us on with loving kindness.

God's love is unconditional, everlasting, unfailing, limitless, pure, and perfect. He loves you as much as His own Son, Jesus Christ (John 17:23). You have never been loved by anyone like God can love you.

I sat across from a friend sharing with her about the identity that Jesus died to give her, the identity that was hers with Jesus as Lord of her life. At the end of our conversation she commented, "Jocelyn, that's nice and all, but it really doesn't do anything for me." As I sat there dumbfounded, I thought, *The way God sees us, embraces us and loves us—this changes everything! Lord, why doesn't this touch her?* And the response I heard was, *Whom is she believing?* I need to ask myself that same question at times during an identity struggle. Am I believing what the world says about me, how I feel about myself, what Satan wants me to believe, or what God says? Am I believing lies or the Truth?

Our true identity, our new name, is all because of Jesus Christ. This God-given identity is not to puff us up, but rather, it humbles us all the more. It is to be used for Him—to serve Him, to walk where He calls us, to tell others about Him, and to see and love others like He does. Are we ready to learn more, to embrace our identity, and walk in truth? Are we ready to answer to our new name?

**Does it matter if you don't feel righteous, forgiven, or beautiful within? What matters is the truth. Women who are controlled by the truth grow into His image just by believing and turning their faces toward God every day.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 163*

What old name(s) is God asking you to reject today?

If you've become His child, what new name(s) is He calling you?

To continue to walk in truth, here are several practical things you can do:

- Soak in the truth of God's Word regularly. Join a Bible study or small group and attend a church that preaches the gospel clearly.
- Ask a Christian friend to become a prayer and accountability partner.
- Read good Christian literature. One that set me on the path to discovering more of God's heart was *Search for Significance* by Robert McGee.
- Learn to share with others what God is showing you, even if you are afraid at first.

What action step will you take this week to begin your journey to embrace your new identity in Christ?

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22–24*

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2*

*How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) Ephesians 1:3–5 (MSG)*

*Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! Ephesians 1:7 (MSG)*



## Week Eleven

### He Is

Read chapters 24 and 25 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

Read Revelation 1:8.

Have you ever limited God? I have. We put God in a “box” whenever we try to figure Him out. It makes us feel better and gives us the illusion that we have some semblance of control. We cannot limit God because He, the Beginning and the End, is eternal. He is, always was, and always will be. To contain Him is impossible. And because of His immensity, the depth of His love and provision is endless. He is our Source, our Well, our Everything.

Read Exodus 3:14. What does this name of God mean to you?

### He Is

God is I AM. He is timeless. He always is. *I AM* in the Hebrew means, “to exist, to be; to become, to come to pass; to be done, to happen, to be finished.” (The Complete WordStudy Old Testament, 1994) How interesting that I AM encompasses past, present, and future. No matter what, no matter when, God *is*.

Read Hebrews 1:3 and John 8:58. What is Scripture saying about Jesus?

We find Jesus being just that in Scripture. He declares He is the Bread of Life (John 6:35). What miracle had He performed in John 6:1–13 prior to this proclamation?

Revisit John 4. Who did Jesus say He was to this “thirsty” woman?

Read John 11:1–44. What event occurred and what did Jesus call Himself (v. 25)?

Read John 9:1–7. What occurred here and who did Jesus say He was?

People were hungry. Jesus fed them. A woman was thirsty. Jesus quenched her need. Death occurred, and Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, prevailed. A man knew only darkness until he met the Light. Jesus *is*. That means Jesus isn’t only on the pages of Scripture revealing Himself in these specific situations, but He wants to reveal Himself

on the pages of our lives as well. Jesus is and wants to be our Everything, our Answer in every situation—our I AM.

### **What about Us?**

If we are fearful, Jesus is our Protector (Psalm 91).

If we are insecure, Jesus is our Confidence (Proverbs 3).

If we are lonely, Jesus is our best Friend (John 15).

If we are anxious, Jesus is our Peace (Isaiah 9).

If we are feeling rejected, Jesus is our Acceptance (Isaiah 41).

If we have a need, Jesus is our Provider (2 Peter 1).

If we are exhausted, Jesus is our Resting Place (Matthew 11).

If we are weak, Jesus is our Strength (Psalm 76, 2 Corinthians 12).

If we are in an emotional storm, Jesus is our Stronghold and Refuge (Psalm 18).

If we are broken, Jesus is our Healer (Psalm 107).

If we are feeling complacent or joyless, Jesus is our Joy and Delight (Psalm 43).

If we are discontented, Jesus is our Contentment and Satisfaction (Psalm 63).

If we are thankful and joyful, Jesus is our Praise (Deuteronomy 10).

In every situation, Jesus is all we need.

Which of the above relate to your needs today? Write down His promises and carry them with you throughout this week. Meditate on them whenever you get a chance.

Let's be even more practical. If we are nervous about giving a presentation at work or dreading a difficult conversation, we can depend on Jesus to be our confidence and our words. He can and will fill our mouths with words that will be not only intelligible, but also impacting. He Himself is the Word. When we are wondering how we are going to pay an unexpected bill, we can bring our concern to Jesus, our Provider. He will not fail to take care of us. David reminds us in Psalm 37:25 that he never saw the righteous forsaken. Our provision may not always be as we would expect—it may be even better! When we are in a transition of some kind and wondering how life will change, Jesus is our Constant. Even though we experience change, He is unchanging. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

My family has been in great transition over the last nine months, and through it all we have watched God open doors we never thought possible. Both my husband and I are entering into areas of expanded ministry. At the outset, we didn't know how God would provide financially or what we would do about health insurance. One day, concerned, I asked my husband what we would do about insurance, and he reassured me that God would take care of it. The next day, I was approached and offered a position with benefits. As the weeks passed, checks came in the mail in support of my husband's new ministry venture. We were never flooded all at once. But as each need came, God provided. We have watched Him take care of us. He has truly been our Direction and Provider.

In what areas or ways do you need Jesus to be your Everything?

**Whatever we need, when we ask, He gives us the best there is—Himself! Jesus is the answer to every thirst known to man. You and I have no need He cannot handle.**

*Meet Me at the Well*, p. 181

Is Jesus your Everything? Why not invite Him to be right now? Write out your prayer in the space below or in your prayer journal.

Jesus is alive. He is working in us, sharing in our laughter and grief. He continues to provide 100-percent forgiveness for our sins. He perseveres in providing miracles and continues to heal in many ways. Jesus reveals Himself to us so we can be Him to the world. Jesus is.

### **He Was**

Several years ago I visited with a precious eighty-five-year-old woman, whom I knew from childhood. She knew my family and the difficult dynamics that existed, as well as my husband's family. Bruce's grandparents prayed fervently for their children and grandchildren, and from their family line came a slew of pastors, Bruce included. As we talked about my husband's and my service to the Lord, she looked at me seriously and asked, "Jocelyn, I know who was praying for Bruce. But who was praying for you?" After I left, her question remained in my mind.

Read John 1:1–4,14. Of whom are these verses speaking?

John says Jesus was in the beginning. But where do we find Him? Read Genesis 1:1. We have learned God created the heavens and the earth. But now read Genesis 1:26. What words stand out to you in this verse?

If God created the heavens and the earth, to whom is He referring when He says “us” and “our”?

The word for *God* in verse 1 and 26 is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, the plural form of God. This word does not indicate the worship of many gods, but it is a plural of majesty. Here is a picture of the Trinity we know as God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not only was God actively creating in the beginning, but Jesus and the Holy Spirit were there as well! Throughout the Old Testament, Jesus was alive and with His Father. He was waiting until God said the word to make His earthly appearance.

Read Luke 24:13–27. What phrase stands out to you in verse 27?

Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah, Haggai, and others, prophesied about Jesus. All Scripture points to Him, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from the Psalms to the Song of Songs. Jesus was the physical embodiment of the great I AM—God’s Word in flesh, the way of Redemption for you and me. Jesus always *was* and always *is*.

My friend’s query about who was praying for me stumped me until several days later. As I was reading the Word, the Lord answered her question. “Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34). The words hit me like a ton of bricks. It was He. Through all those years of aimless wandering with little sense of purpose and worth, through all the poor decisions and pain, He was the One praying for me. He was the One talking to the Father on my behalf, the One reminding the Judge of Heaven and Earth that the price of my sin had been paid. He was the One providing mercy, grace, and protection as I stumbled in utter confusion. He was the One lovingly guiding me with discipline when I needed it desperately. He was the One who saw and declared the future and hope that lay ahead. Jesus had been there the entire time.

### **What about Us?**

He has been there for you, too. Whether during the mundane Mondays or the more significant events of your past, Jesus was with you. Write down various memories and how, looking back, you now see the evidence of His Presence.

How does this speak to you personally about the heart of God?

How will knowing that Jesus always was affect how you view and live your present?

Jesus helped to create us. He left His Heavenly home and came to earth to save us from a certain death and hell. He took our guilty verdict and freed us from sin. Since that time He has interceded for us over and over again. Jesus has made us Kingdom ambassadors and given us another day. He has watched us grow and has protected us in ways we aren't even aware of. He has brought us through trial after trial, His patience never exhausted, His passion never extinguished. Jesus always *was*.

### **He Is to Come**

Revisit Luke 24:25. Oh, that Jesus would not regard us in this same way!

Prophecy after prophecy in God's Word has been fulfilled. Out of many we could list, three of these—Isaiah 53, Zechariah 9:9, and Micah 5:2—have been fulfilled in Luke 18:31–33, Matthew 21:1–11, and Matthew 2:1–6 respectively. What are these prophecies?

There are still more to be fulfilled. God's children have the privilege of taking part in their fulfillment, not because of anything wonderful we have done, but all because of Jesus. Scriptures prophesying Christ's return are prevalent: Matthew 16:27; 24:30–31; 26:64; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; and Revelation 1:7, to name a few. We can bank on it—God's Word holds true. He is coming back for His children. Jesus *is to come*.

Revisit Revelation 1:8. We have mentioned that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega (the Beginning and the End), that He *is* and *was* and *is to come*. But what other description is listed?

Who knew that one small verse in Revelation could be so packed with meaning? Not only is God the Beginning and the End, the great I AM, but He is also the Almighty. This means He is the all-ruling God, having dominion, power, and strength. His might is absolute and universal. Nothing can trump Him! Take this personally. If you belong to Jesus Christ, no matter how bleak circumstances appear, absolutely nothing in your life can prevail against God.

At some point, God will redeem our adversity. It may not be until next month, next year, or until we reach Heaven. In the meantime, God uses our circumstances to teach us and strengthen us for His glory. Life can be difficult and filled with many questions. To live it and survive takes faith in Christ. People want evidence they can see. They want something they can get their minds around. What people don't realize is that faith can't be proven, and we can't get our minds around God. God wants us to trust Him. God wants us to have childlike faith.

**How do we change and become like little children again? For me it means to receive life daily as a gift from His hand. It means to rest quietly on His great lap, knowing my Father has everything that concerns me under control. He will never leave me or forsake me. I am His child forever, and He my Savior, Friend, and Father. I need nothing He will not provide. On His lap, I live close to His heart, near His ear, able to hear His softest whispers.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 174*

This morning I received word that one of my dear friends went home to be with the Lord. Today is her birthday—what a gift she received! This week I sat by her bed holding her hand. We laughed, we talked, we prayed. She knew what was coming, and she looked forward to it, often verbalizing her desire to go Home. Jesus had become her Everything. Through her days of declining health, she continued to declare that she had perfect peace. Her peace was Him. Several weeks earlier, as she lay in her hospital bed feeling physically cold, alone, and uncertain, a tingling warmth began at her head, traced down through her body to her toes, and flowed back up the other side of her body. She knew God was there and had touched her. He had become her Warmth and her Company. She knew He was the answer for her every need. My friend has now seen it all—the *was*, the *is*, and the *is to come*. She is experiencing the fulfillment of God's plan from the very

beginning—intimate relationship with Him face-to-face. Be reminded today that you too have access to this huge God. Not only access, but you have been given the opportunity for intimacy with Him. And someday, intimacy face-to-face. In your life, Jesus *is*, Jesus *was*, and Jesus *is to come*.

### **What about Us?**

Read Revelation 21 and 22. Because this is a longer reading, carve out some uninterrupted time this week and reflect on what you have read below.

What things stand out to you from these chapters?

What do you most look forward to in Heaven?

After reading these chapters, take this time to respond to Jesus in prayer. Reading this text may leave you feeling joy, wonder, awe, excitement, gratitude, or perhaps even anxiety. Talk to Him about whatever is on your heart.

For further study this week, explore the concordance in the back of your Bible. Turn to the heading “God” and skim down the columns. (Don’t be intimidated, as there are quite a few.) Every time you see “God is . . .” or “He is . . .”, stop. Turn to that Scripture and record the verse. When you are finished, you will have a list of some of the attributes of God. He is incredible. He is more than you have imagined Him to be. All these descriptions are eye-opening and speak to one’s heart to trust and depend on Him as your Everything.

*For by [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.  
Colossians 1:16–17*

*Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” Revelation 4:8–11*



## Week Twelve

### The Heart of the Matter

Read chapters 26, 27, and 28 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

Recently I spoke to a group of mothers about how we can make God real to our children. Several weeks later, I saw one of the mothers who had been at the meeting at my son's basketball game. Her son was on the opposing team. Unfortunately, I can be a little competitive. As the game grew more intense, I cheered and yelled encouraging things—until their coach did something totally uncalled for. Fiery words zinged out of my mouth and echoed through the gym. I sensed the weight of a stare. Trying to be casual (as if I could at that point), I turned my head, and our eyes locked. How impressed she probably was at my example of making God real to my children.

How many times do we wish we could take something back that was said carelessly or in the heat of the moment? Thankfully, God has given us insight about the tongue and how we can find miraculous strength to control it.

#### Power of the Tongue

Read James 3:1–2.

In speaking about the tongue, James doesn't mince words. He begins by addressing teachers, those called by God to instruct others to apply the Word of God. James gives a warning to teachers. What is it?

What is the reasoning behind this warning? Read Romans 2:17–24 and Matthew 23:1–3.

Paul and Jesus are challenging the teachers of the law. Since a teacher's job was to instruct and interpret God's Word, they needed to be speaking truth. Secondly, they could teach the law, but were they following it themselves? Teaching carries with it a heavy responsibility. The calling entails equipping God's people so they may grow in unity, knowledge, and maturity (Ephesians 4:12–13). A teacher's speech and actions affect many—thus, James' strong warning.

In verse 2, James broadens his focus to include everyone. In the Greek, *stumble* means to trip, fall, offend, or sin. We can all relate to that, can't we? How many times have we offended someone or figuratively stumbled and fell flat on our faces with our speech? What does James' next statement tell you about the power of the tongue?

The power of the tongue is so strong that if we learn to control it, we will be able to control our entire body. Scripture says that if anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man. In the Greek, the word *perfect* means mature, or a man obedient in Christ. Our mouths dictate our maturity.

Do we realize the power of the tongue? Whether positive or negative, our words affect others and ultimately affect us. Read Matthew 12:33–37. The word *careless* in verse 36 is defined as “idle or unprofitable.” (The Complete WordStudy New Testament, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991) In your opinion, what kinds of speech would be classified as careless?

Looking at these same verses, what is the relationship between our heart and our speech?

As believers, our goal is an obedient heart, which leads to maturity in Christ. Will we ever reach perfection? Not this side of Heaven. But the desire of our hearts should always be to grow more and more into Christ’s likeness with every passing year. With that growth must come transforming changes in our speech. If we have patterns of speech that are continually unhealthy or destructive, we need to look in our hearts for the root of the problem. Does anger, hurt, fear, insecurity, or unforgiveness reside there? Are we believing lies? What is fueling the fire of our words?

### **What about Us?**

If our mouths dictate our maturity, rate your “maturity” level from 1–10.

What kinds of careless speech do you struggle with most (negativity, complaining, swearing, berating, pointed humor, etc.)? What sins do these reveal?

**If God doesn’t own me fully,  
the whole package, my  
tongue will never be under  
His control. . . . If Jesus is  
Lord on the inside, whether  
we’re shaken, stirred, or  
broken in bits, His person  
will come out; His love will  
express itself. . . . It can’t be  
otherwise.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 192*

## Personality of the Tongue

Read James 3:3–8.

The tongue has its own personality, and it's not good. List the descriptions James uses in the following verses to describe the tongue:

v. 5

v. 6

v. 8

The tongue is small but can do great damage, just like a tiny spark escalating into a forest fire. In what ways have words caused you or others great damage?

Examine the following scenarios:

Read Ephesians 4:25. You're hurt and angry. A spouse or friend asks you repeatedly what is bothering you, and you continue to reply with a curt, "Nothing." The conversation stops, and a silent discord takes its place. However harmless we think it is, hiding the truth can do great damage. Often it's easier to lie than deal with conflict. Suppressing feelings or keeping secrets can begin a stronghold, placing a wedge between us and God. Any type of falsehood is corrupt—lying, deceit (Proverbs 17:20), flattery (Proverbs 26:28)—and is a speech pattern we need to change. Without knowing it, we pass those patterns onto our children.

Read Proverbs 11:13. Gossip is another sinful pattern that does irreparable damage. Not only does it cause dissension between friends, but it also can tarnish another's reputation. Any time we know we are betraying a confidence and get that uneasy feeling of conviction, it's probably gossip. We want to strive to be trustworthy in character and in speech. If we promise not to tell others, we must keep that promise. (If there is ever a time when someone plans to hurt himself or another, you must divulge that information to someone who can help.)

Read Ephesians 4:29–31. You can't forget what she did. Every time her name comes up in conversation, you can't help but contribute a snide comment or share your negative feelings about her. Unwholesome talk. In the Greek, the word for *unwholesome* describes those things which are rotten, foul, or putrid. In various writings this word was often used in the context of spoiled fish or rotten grapes on the ground. And so it is with negative words. They leave a putrid stench for all to breathe.

Have you been the victim of any of these situations? How did it affect you? How about when you were the one offering unwholesome talk?

Revisit James 3:8. Of what does James say the tongue is full?

In the Greek, the word *poison* describes venom from a snake. You and I have the poison of serpents under our tongues. That's powerful. And dangerous. We can seriously injure and even kill others with our words.

### **What about Us?**

Have you ever seriously injured someone else with your words or experienced injury yourself? What was the outcome?

Have you taken the opportunity to ask for forgiveness? Have you offered forgiveness, even if it hasn't been requested?

Let's take the opportunity to rid our hearts of anything unclean, and make things right with the person we've offended and with God. Our goal is maturity in Christ. In order for that to occur, we need to take deliberate, sometimes difficult, steps forward. What intentional action will you take this week to make that happen?

### **Purpose of the Tongue**

Read James 3:9–12.

The tongue's ability poses a dichotomy. What is the tongue capable of doing (vv. 9–10)?

What is the desire of one's heart when one curses another (look up the definition of *curse* in the dictionary)?

What is the irony that James points out in verse 9?

God made us in His image, in His likeness. *Image* means we are not the original (that is God), but we resemble the original. He has planted in us characteristics of Himself that were spoiled by sin. However, with new life in Christ, Scripture says we are perfected in righteousness, holiness, and knowledge (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10). Every individual, whether believer or unbeliever, has a “God-stamp.” We are all made in His image.

Knowing that, how does that change your perspective of others? What perspective would that bring when cursing another?

What is the command given to believers in James 3:10?

What are we to do with our tongues? What are practical ways we can discipline them? Read the following Scriptures and identify a current situation to which you can apply each verse.

Ephesians 4:29

Proverbs 15:1

Luke 6:27–28

Romans 12:14

Psalm 71:8

Read Lamentations 3:19–23. When Jeremiah was discouraged, he changed his mindset and the words of his mouth from painful feelings to the sacrifice of praise and reminded himself of God’s character. Is there a situation for which you need to practice the same?

As we studied before in Matthew 12, we are reminded again in Psalm 19:14. What is the priority in learning to control our tongues?

What would happen if every morning, and throughout the day, we were to bow our hearts before God and ask for purity and a filling of His Spirit? We want to speak from hearts that are full of Him. Hearts that encourage, uplift, and bring a word of life to someone else. Hearts that worship and praise. Hearts that are humble, prayerful, joyful, thankful, and free. When our speech begins to deteriorate, we can stop and look at what’s going on within. Once we identify the problem, we need to confess it and hand our hearts back over to Him to fill with Himself. Our hearts are the well from which our speech flows.

Revisit James 3:11–12. In verse 11, James illustrates the paradox of praising God and cursing others with the same tongue. It’s impossible to have a spring produce both fresh and bitter water or a tree produce fruit that is not in its design. And so it is with our tongues. A salty spring cannot produce fresh water. Our tongues were meant to be God’s—to speak His words, to promote life and truth, to praise and glorify Him. In the Greek, *spring* means “fountain.” What did Jesus tell Moriah in John 4:14? “. . . but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a *spring* of water welling up to eternal life” (Emphasis mine)

“All my fountains are in you” (Psalm 87:7).

**“As they make music they will sing, ‘All my fountains are in you’” (Psalm 87:7). Yes. It made perfect sense now. As Jesus fills me continually with Himself, His springs of Living Water must flow somewhere. Sure, they flow out to others . . . but each little drop returns back to God as a chorus of worship. Amazing!**  
*Meet Me at the Well*, p. 200

### What about Us?

Is there someone in your life whom you need to view differently—see their “God-stamp”?

How will you change the way you interact with them?

What things do you want to bring before Jesus in regards to your speech? Now is the time to pour out your heart to Him however you feel led—asking for help, confessing, seeking forgiveness, asking Him to search your heart, praying His Word (Psalm 141:3, Psalm 19:14), giving Him praise.

*Words satisfy the mind as much as fruit does the stomach; good talk is as gratifying as a good harvest. Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—you choose.*  
*Proverbs 18:20–21 (MSG)*

*I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of destruction, out of the sticky mud. He stood me on a rock and made my feet steady. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.* *Psalm 40:1–3 (NCV)*

*He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.*  
*Proverbs 13:3*

## Week Thirteen

### Living It Out

Read chapters 29, 30, and 31 of *Meet Me at the Well*.

I once saw a bumper sticker that read, “I like your Jesus. I don’t like you Christians. You are nothing like your Jesus.” Ouch. If true, what are we Christians doing wrong? Why the vast difference between Jesus’ example and ours?

Throughout the last twelve weeks we have looked at various aspects of our Christian walk, but this last week is the culmination of them all. This lesson deals with living out our faith. How are we Christians to look and act so others see the real Jesus in us? What is the evidence of a soul that belongs to Jesus Christ? Leave it to Scripture to show us the way.

First and foremost, what does it really mean to “be Jesus” to a lost and dying world (see 1 John 5:10–12)?

He who “has” Christ (v. 12) holds on to Christ, regards or possesses Christ. Without Christ dwelling in us, there is no hope of us living or loving beyond ourselves. There is no hope of eternal life with Him. But with Christ, we can live in the light of truth, experience sweet fellowship with each other, and be purified from all sin by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7). Once we have Jesus, we can then begin to learn and grow and show Him to others. The question to ask ourselves is this: Are we living out what we believe? The following actions are the fruit of a genuine faith—a love relationship with our God.

#### **Obeying His Commands**

Read 1 John 2:3–6.

I was pulling out of a parking space and turning to go home when a precious little boy ran from his mother’s vehicle and into the parking lot. As I put on my brakes, I saw his mother turn around with panic on her face, yelling for him to stop. She ran towards her son and grabbed him, stopping him in his tracks. He looked up at me smiling, oblivious of the danger from which his mother had protected him.

We can be so much like that little boy. As we grew up, rules seemed more like annoying hindrances that kept us from having fun. We didn’t have the foresight to see the potential danger that existed outside our parents’ set parameters. And yet as we matured, we saw the value of limits. Similarly, maturing in Christ broadens our vision even more. We not only see the necessity of His commands, we become thankful for them when we discover God’s motivation behind the commands. His motives aren’t about the rules as much as they are about relationship.



In each of these Scriptures, what does obedience bring to the child of God?

John 14:21

Proverbs 19:16

John 15:9–11

James 1:22–25

Romans 2:13

1 John 2:3–6

Obedience to God's commands is the evidence that He lives in us. Our obedience and those things that come with it—joy, Jesus' revelation of Himself, blessing, life, protection, growth, assurance—all impart a growing love relationship with our Father. He longs for us to obey Him out of pure devotion and because we want to honor and please Him, even if it means hardship and walking as Jesus did (v. 6). Jesus laid down His life to obey His Father because His love for Him was that great. In Jesus, we see God's unconditional love spilling over upon us. Our obedience to God declares the same things.

When we obey,

- we know that we belong to Him,
- we express our love to Him,
- we/others see God's love in us,
- we live as Jesus did.

God desires us to obey His commands for His glory and for our growth and benefit. When we obey Him, we declare to the world who He is.

### **What about Us?**

Think of a scenario in which you struggle to be obedient. What are your thoughts/motivations as you contemplate your choice?

Consider what obedience brings and what it declares. How can this bring new light to your struggle?

God cares about the little things. Ask God to help you obey Him today whether it's offering a random act of kindness, not saying that unkind word, or being honest with the waitress because she forgot to charge you for your coffee. Love God through your obedience in small ways.

### **Loving His People**

Our faith is expressed not only by obeying God's commands, but also by loving His people. One of my favorite times of premarital counseling with young couples is describing the amazing privilege and responsibility they have in their love relationship. As outsiders watch the couple interact in love, they should be able to see the incredible love that Jesus Christ holds for each of us personally. Their marriage should reflect the love of Christ to all who watch them! It is the same for you and me. As believers, we are to give to others the love that Christ lavishes on us. Because He lives in us and His love dwells in us, God gives us opportunities daily to extend that love to many who have never experienced anything like it.

Read 1 John 3:16–18. How is the believer's love to be expressed?

Now read James 2:14–18. What does James call faith without action?

What action word stands out to you in verse 18?

Loving another isn't simply speaking the language of love. It isn't something we only feel emotionally. As children of God, loving others is something we *do*. A child of God has a faith of action.

**Need more love for others? Ask for it  
with a heart ready to obey. In God's  
eyes, love and obedience are one and  
the same.**

*Meet Me at the Well*, p. 204

The believer loves not only through action, but also through choice. Read 1 John 2:9–11. The love John speaks of is *agapao*. It is not based on sheer emotion, but is a love of the will. *Agapao* is the love God has for us.

What does John say about those who love their brothers?

What does it mean to cause others to stumble?

What does it mean to cause ourselves to stumble?

James says that whoever loves his brother (and sister) lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. The Greek word used here for *stumble* means “the trigger in the trap on which the bait is placed and that springs the trap when it is touched by the animal, causing the trap to close.” This word “always denotes the enticement leading to conduct which brings with it the ruin of the person in question” (*The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates, 1991). Satan has placed the bait in the trap and is waiting for us to grab it. If he can turn our hearts cold to those God has commanded us to love, he has ruined us. Our hearts belong to God. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom and light. Anything short of loving our brother or sister is dangerous, even fatal.

### **What about Us?**

If you are like all the rest of us, you have had difficulty loving someone. There are those in our lives who have caused us pain or are simply hard to get along with. What do we do? It’s tough, if not impossible, to love them on our own. So we pray for them, asking God to give us His supernatural love for them. We ask God to bless them, heal them, and meet their every need. Where there are hurts or wounds in their hearts, we ask God to bind them up. Where there is sin, we ask that God will convict and cleanse. Over time, our feelings for them begin to change. We don’t have to become best friends, but God truly does empty our hearts of anger and fill them with love, peace, and compassion. As our hearts change, our behavior and speech will change as well.

I speak as one who has experienced God’s touch. Individuals whom I thought were friends turned out to be those who spoke lies about my family. They attempted to cause discord and division among the body of Christ. Not only was I angry, but those I was called to love, I could not. My heart was full of unrest. And so I began to pray. I asked God to bless them with all that they needed, and I asked for God’s love to soak my heart. I remember the day I shook their hands and exchanged greetings. For the first time, my heart was not seething with anger. It was at peace and felt compassion. Not only did my anger melt, but God revealed to me the trap Satan had set for me. If I allowed unforgiveness and hate to take root, I would not experience what Jesus died for me to have. I would allow others to keep me from Christ. His gift is too precious not to walk in the light.

If today you find yourself caught in a trap, take time to confess your anger or unforgiveness to the Lord. Allow Him to disengage the trigger and set you free.

Read 1 John 4:20–21. Who needs your prayers today? How will you pray for them?

How would you describe your typical pattern of loving: with words or tongue, or with actions and in truth?

To love like a believer, how can you alter the way you love in general? How will you make changes?

**But God’s love isn’t contingent on our capacity to love Him back. Once turned loose, it is the only power on earth capable of changing another human life from the inside out. God calls it grace, totally unmerited love. Receiving grace can be revolutionary. Giving it is God-like.**

*Meet Me at the Well, p. 205*

### **Turning His Way**

Read 1 John 3:6–10.

Another fruit in the believer’s life is developing the habit of turning away from sin and turning like a healthy plant toward the Light. For example, if we are trying to lose weight and feel drawn to the freezer for ice cream, it all comes down to a moment’s decision. In order to defeat the temptation, we have to turn around and walk the other direction.

It’s the same with any temptation. Through the power of Christ within us, we can turn our backs and walk away. Either we will choose to kill the habitual sin in our lives or it will kill us. Of course, we will make mistakes. But as believers, we desire to learn from our mistakes and grow in maturity, learning to do what’s right. We may think we’ve done too many things wrong or there is no longer hope for help and forgiveness, but that’s not true. God always wants us to turn to Him for forgiveness, grace, and strength, and to turn His way.

### **What about Us?**

Is God calling you to turn your back on temptation to sin and turn His way?

We can't do this alone. To obey His commandments, love others, and turn His way, we need Jesus. Because of God's marvelous gift of salvation, we can receive Him by faith. Jesus offers real hope and victory for you and me.

*“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too. We know we love God's children if we love God and obey his commandments. Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. For every child of God defeats this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.” 1 John 5:1–5 (NLT)*

Whom do people say you look like? Do you have your mother's eyes or your father's dimples? Your grandmother's fiery personality or your grandfather's sense of humor? Have you ever been told you look like Jesus? Obeying His commandments, loving His people, and turning toward Him, you're looking more and more like Him everyday.

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

*Here's how we can be sure that we know God in the right way: Keep His commandments. If someone claims, “I know him well!” but doesn't keep his commandments, he's obviously a liar. His life doesn't match his words. But the one who keeps God's word is the person in whom we see God's mature love. This is the only way to be sure we're in God. Anyone who claims to be intimate with God ought to live the same kind of life Jesus lived. 1 John 2:3–6 (MSG)*

*Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that. Ephesians 5:1 (MSG)*

The Word of God is life-changing and meant to be applied in our everyday actions. We have covered much, but look back over this study and choose one thing that you will incorporate into your life, practicing it at home, with friends, at work, wherever you go and with whomever you meet. Living out our faith in Christ all comes down to obedience and love—and it all begins with Jesus. Let's meet Him daily at the well.

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