



# UNSHAKABLE

STRENGTHENING OUR FAITH THROUGH THE EYES OF JOHN



**StoneRidge**  
FELLOWSHIP



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## INTRODUCTION

How would you describe the strength and depth of your faith?

The strength of our faith is largely determined by what we truly believe about Jesus.

So what do you truly believe about the Lord Jesus? Many see him as a great man, a meek miracle-worker, an amazing teacher, the greatest prophet, the Son of God and in many other roles.

The first four books of the New Testament – the Gospels – offer four unique perspectives on the life of Jesus. Each book provides a unique vantage point for observing Jesus' life and teaching. John's Gospel, however, stands apart in providing perhaps the most intimate glimpse into the character, conduct, and claims of Jesus.

This devotional will accompany our Sunday series. In it we invite you to explore on your own and in a small group the life of Jesus as revealed through John's eyes. You will be introduced to Jesus by means of nine vignettes, or snapshots, from his life. Each vignette provides a unique window into Jesus' life and helps us come to a better understanding of this God-man who invites us to follow him.

Each week you will be invited to engage your head, heart, and hands in response to the reading. The lessons culminate in huddle questions which are discussed with members of a small group.

**Head** – In this section you're encouraged to explore the passage for what it communicates and means (i.e. the cognitive). The questions will guide you through the process of understanding the passage and better understanding the person of Jesus.

**Heart** – This section encourages you to personalize what you've read. Here you'll have an opportunity to engage the passage for yourself, asking what is significant to you and why.

**Hands** – What we do with what we know is the barometer of effective learning. Each week you will be challenged to apply what you learned. This may look different for each person, but the key is to learn the practical art of obedience. You have the option of choosing your own level of application: *Light, Moderate, or Challenging*.

**Huddle** – A huddle is a small group of people. This can be done with your life group, as a couple or a family. Questions will be provided to help guide your discussion as you share what you learned and learn from what others share.

Welcome to the journey toward an unshakeable faith.

*Pastor Steve Adams  
Interim Teaching Pastor*

## **Week 1: He Came Among Us**

Passage: John 1:1-14

### Introduction

Medieval and early modern kings and queens in England and France were believed to have power to heal those suffering from various diseases. The thinking was that because monarchs were ordained by God, their presence and touch could convey healing powers on the sick and diseased. In what became known as the “royal touch”, the monarch would touch the face or neck of the infected person, read from the Gospels of Mark and John, and offer a prayer for healing. By offering the royal touch, monarchs also moved themselves from a position of distance and authority to humanity and grace.

John begins his Gospel by looking at Jesus in light of time and eternity. He highlights both Jesus’ godhead (he was with God and was God in the beginning) as well as his manhood (he became flesh and dwelt among us). Jesus was both King of kings as well as a common man with all the limitations that entailed. But what is uncommon about Jesus is that he was both the creator and the redeemer of all who believe in him. His ‘royal touch’ conveyed not only life, but ‘new birth’, healing and hope.

### **Head**

List some things you learn about Jesus (‘the Word’) from verses 1-5.

There are some faiths/religions which claim that Jesus wasn’t God, or that God created him. How could you prove such statements false from these verses?

What was John the Baptist’s role in Jesus’ coming?

How similarly do you see your role as a Christ follower?

John refers to Jesus as the “true light” in verse 9. What does the “true light” do and how well is he received?

What are the benefits of believing in Jesus according to these verses?

What does verse 14 teach you about Jesus?

In your own words, explain the meaning of grace and truth.

### **Heart**

In what ways have you found Jesus to be a "light" to you personally?

To what extent do you consider your life to be about "bearing witness about the light"?

Have you ever experienced rejection? How did it feel?

Consider the fact that Jesus was rejected by the very people he created and came to earth to save and redeem. Write your reflections as you consider this unimaginable act of grace.

Jesus' life was characterized by both grace and truth. What tends to happen if you have one without the other?

Which of the two do you need to exercise more of in your life?

## **Hands**

**Light:** Call, text, or write a letter of encouragement to someone you know who is going through a difficult time (“light”).

**Moderate:** Pay a visit, it may be by zoom or at a distance, to someone who is going through a difficult time (“dwelt among us”).

**Challenging:** Use one of your gifts or abilities to serve someone you know who needs your help (“he gave”). Examples include, but are not limited to, making a meal, repairing or renovating something, doing yard work (you get the idea!).

## **Huddle (for your group time)**

1. Read John 1:1-14 aloud together. Have each person in your group share the most significant thing she or he learned from this passage.
2. Why do you think John begins his Gospel by taking us all the way back to the beginning, before Creation?
3. What distinguishes Jesus from all the other religious founders & leaders in the world?
4. Share how Jesus is a light to you personally.
5. Share a story of how you've shared that 'light' with someone you know (i.e. witnessed/evangelized)
6. What can we learn about Jesus' response to rejection?
7. How do you balance grace and truth? In other words, how do you know when to speak truth into a situation or demonstrate an act of generous giving?

## Week 2: See for Yourself

Passage: John 1:35-51

### Introduction

If you follow technology very closely, you're probably familiar with some of the latest developments in virtual reality. Virtual reality is a computer technology that artificially creates sensory experience in an attempt to replicate reality. In other words, it's getting as close to real experience as you can without it being firsthand experience. Examples include driving and flight simulators, video games, IMAX movies, and military training simulators. Virtual reality has been around for over 70 years, but in the last several years it has attained greater notoriety with the virtual reality headsets. This technology offers a 3D experience that responds to our motions and alters 'reality' accordingly. While the results are quite impressive, nothing can come close to the reality of firsthand experience.

In John 1:35-51, John reveals the importance of encountering Jesus firsthand. Hearing someone's personal story about Jesus is important and can be inspiring, but nothing can take the place of seeing Jesus for yourself. Human connections provide a bridge to Jesus. Whether it is pointing people to Jesus (as John the Baptist did) or leading people to Jesus (as Andrew and Phillip did), each person has a role in evangelism. As each person encounters Jesus, however, s/he sees Jesus from a unique vantage point as you will observe.

How do *you* see Jesus?

### **Head**

As you read through the passage, there are six different titles that Jesus is given. List them below (hint: you can find them in vv. 36, 38, 41, 45, and 49):

Consider each of the titles you listed above. Next to each one, describe what that particular title reveals to you about who Jesus was (the first one is done for you):

Lamb of God = Jesus was the fulfilment of the promise God made that a perfect "lamb" would be slain for the sins of the world. Jesus was that perfect sacrifice.

Rabbi =

List all the people who are mentioned in this passage and explain (or show) how each of them is connected.

What do these connections suggest to you about the power of pointing people to Jesus? In other words, what lesson do you learn about 'relational evangelism'?

### **Heart**

Of the six titles above, how do *you* tend to "see" Jesus and why?

Which of the disciples mentioned in this passage can you relate to the most and why?

What was true of Nathanael is true of you as well – Jesus sees you wherever you are and knows you intimately. If Jesus was to describe you, what description might he use? Explain.

What character quality of Jesus do you think is most evident in you?

What character quality of Jesus would you like to possess more of?

What is the most natural way for you to "point" (introduce) other people to Jesus?

### **Hands**

**Light.** Think of a person you're connected to who doesn't know Jesus. Pray daily for this person to be open to the gospel.

*Moderate:* Pray for an opportunity to share your faith story with a friend, neighbour, or acquaintance who doesn't follow Jesus.

*Challenging:* Seek out an opportunity to share your faith story or some aspect of the gospel.

### **Huddle**

1. What was your most significant take-away from this week's topic and devotional?
2. Share with your group the aspect of Jesus that most clearly stands out to you and why?
3. In what ways were you challenged by this week's study?
4. Which of the disciples did you relate to the most and why?
5. What are your strengths and weaknesses in pointing other people to Jesus?
6. Share your own plan for putting what you've learned into action (i.e. "Hands").
7. Discuss practical ideas for how your group could work together in the area of evangelism.

### **Week 3 – It's Not About The Wine**

Passage: John 2:1-11

#### Introduction

The French wine industry was nearly devastated in the mid-1800s by a vine disease caused by *Phylloxera*, an aphid that came over from North America. In what became known as “The Great Wine Blight”, many if not most of the vines in France (and much of Europe) were completely destroyed due to the disease. Since France’s economy was so dependent upon the wine industry, the government desperately sought for solutions to this epidemic. Fortunately the innovation of two French vintners, Leo Laliman and Gaston Bazille, helped stem the tide of this disaster. They developed a method in which European vines were grafted to resistant American rootstock which was not susceptible to the *Phylloxera*. Thanks to this breakthrough discovery, France was able to rebuild its wine industry (literally) from the ground up by planting these disease-resistant vines.

In John 2 we find Jesus early in his ministry faced with a similar crisis of much smaller proportions: the wedding wine has run out and the host is panicking! This isn’t life or death; but it *is* embarrassing! Jesus has a way of surprising people. The wedding at Cana seems an unlikely place to begin his ministry. Jesus spares the host his embarrassment by becoming the world’s greatest vintner – the best wine produced instantaneously at no cost! Granted, it’s not about the wine. Jesus here proves his divinity – he IS the long promised one. But at this point, only a few know this for certain.

#### **Head**

Reread the interaction between Jesus and his mother in vv. 1-5 (note: the expression, ‘Woman’, is one of polite distance, unlike the pejorative connotation it has today). How does Mary view her son, based upon this conversation?

Jesus’ response to his mother and then his subsequent instructions to the servants, on one hand, seem contradictory. But take note, as you read this passage, of the people who are actually aware of this miracle. Who are they, and what impact does it have upon their faith?

What is the quality of the wine that Jesus “produces”? Read Isaiah 25:6-9. What do these passages taken together reveal about the quality and breadth of the good gifts God promises through Jesus Christ?

## Heart

Do you ever fall into the trap of feeling that if you *really* surrender everything to Christ, you'll somehow get cheated in some way? Why do we tend to think in this way?

What does this type of thinking suggest about our level of faith and the lies we buy into?

Is there something in your life either keeping you from believing fully in Christ's power, or somehow thinking he doesn't have your best in mind? Write your reflections below.

## Hands

**Light:** The key to moving forward is to release what hinders you. Ask God to increase your faith (see Mark 9:24) and help you release whatever is in your life that is keeping you from moving forward in obedience.

**Moderate:** God is asking you to move out in faith today or this week. In prayer and obedience follow through with whatever he is calling you to do.

**Challenging:** You've taken the first two steps, releasing what you were holding on to and moving forward in obedience. Now God is calling you to embrace a larger, riskier vision. Maybe you've imagined a goblet of wine, but Jesus is asking you to imagine the impossible – six large stone water jars overflowing with wine. Do you believe he can do the impossible? Then it's time to embrace the vision he's given you, whatever that may look like.

## Huddle

1. What is the single most significant thing you learned from this week's lesson?
2. How has what you've learned impacted your relationship with God, your behavior, etc? Or has it? Explain.
3. Share your answers to the first two questions under "Heart". Set aside time to explore these questions together.
4. Discuss the successes and the challenges for you in the area of evangelism.
5. What has your response been for this week's lesson on "Hands"?
6. How can your group work together to create a culture of invitation (i.e. "Come and see")?

## **Week 4 – Seven Words Change Everything**

Passage: John 3:1-21

### Introduction

One of the most striking examples of change in the natural world is evident in the metamorphosis of the monarch butterfly. The monarch begins as a tiny egg the size of a sesame seed and, when hatched, is no longer than 2 mm in length – small enough to fit on the head of a pin. As it grows it sheds its skin several times until finally it attaches itself to a twig. Once attached, it's entombed within its final shedding, called a pupa. Remaining entombed and motionless for about 10 days, it finally emerges from its shell, spreads its wings and takes flight, spending the remainder of its life feasting on nectar and reproducing. This final 'rebirth' is by far the most profound, transforming the monarch from a land-bound insect to a soaring, brilliantly-coloured butterfly.

In John 3 Jesus uses the metaphor of rebirth to illustrate the transformation that must take place if you want to be part of God's kingdom. In one of the most popular passages in all of scripture, Jesus states emphatically: "You must be born again." Without rebirth, we remain as it were, land-bound, forfeiting an opportunity to soar as God enables. Our natural tendency as people is to bring to Jesus' a whole bunch of excuses, or a mouthful of religious talk, in an effort to gain favor. Jesus is simply asking us to respond to the 'wind' of the Spirit, and believe. When we do, we are ushered into a new way of seeing, thinking, and living as the wind comes under our wings enabling us to fly.

### **Head**

Write down some of your initial observations from this passage (e.g. something new you learned, questions you have, etc.).

Two weeks ago you identified the various titles Jesus was given. One of them was "Messiah", referring to the promised one from the Old Testament. Based upon the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, how did Nicodemus and his peers, the religious leaders, misunderstand who the Messiah was?

How did Jesus respond to Nicodemus, and what kind of clarity did he give regarding the purpose and mission of the Messiah – Jesus himself?

Read John 1:11-13 and 3:16-17. What do these verses reveal to you about the heart of God for his people (Israel) and the world (all nations)?

How important is belief, and what is the greatest hindrance to belief, according to 3:16-21?

## **Heart**

Have you been born again? If so, describe the time when you responded to the Holy Spirit and believed in Jesus.

Nicodemus clearly had his faults. Yet to his credit he was open with Jesus about his questions, even though he, in a sense, 'lost face'. When you meet with Jesus in your prayer time, how open and honest are you with him? Do you express your doubts, questions, frustrations, and fears? Write your thoughts below.

Paul often refers to the struggle between the spirit and the flesh (e.g. Romans 7). The main impediment to Nicodemus' understanding and faith was that he hadn't been "born by the Spirit". If you have been born by the Spirit, how are you doing in the area of living by the Spirit? In other words, are you driven more by what you want or what God wants to do through you? Explain.

## **Hands**

*Light:* Who is the Nicodemus in your life – the seeker after truth? Pray daily for this person.

*Moderate:* Connect with this person over coffee and be ready to "give an answer for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

*Challenging:* Pray, connect, and invite. As you pray and connect, look for the opportunity to invite this person along to something that has 'kingdom content' they can connect with StoneRidge on Sundays without leaving their living rooms. Share your own story of God's grace.

## **Huddle**

1. What is the most important lesson you learned from this week's study?
2. Share a question that emerged from the study? Discuss it as a group.
3. What impressed you most about Jesus' response to Nicodemus?
4. What is the environment like where you work and/or socialize? Are people generally curious about these questions, or closed to them? Discuss.
5. Share your answer to one of the questions under the "Heart" category.
6. A couple of weeks ago you were asked to share how individually and as a group you could share your faith. How did you respond to this week's "Hands" question?
7. How often are you reading and meditating on God's word?
8. How can your group help you in keeping one other accountable to be in the word daily?

## **Week 5 – Unhindered**

Passage: John 4:1-42

### Introduction

In her book, *The Culture Map*, Erin Meyer opens our eyes to how different cultures communicate and understand communication differently. These cultural differences can easily create obstacles to effective communication. But understanding the various cultural nuances can create great opportunity as well. For example, understanding that people in countries such as China and Japan have a tendency to view things within larger contexts and need to understand how everything is connected can put a North American businessperson at a great advantage when communicating an idea. Rather than approaching solutions more directly and succinctly, she or he will build out the wider context first before narrowing the presentation to the desired solution. These kinds of culturally sensitive approaches can be the difference between receptivity to an idea and resistance to an idea.

When passing through Samaria Jesus encounters a cross-cultural opportunity: a Samaritan woman drawing water from Jacob's well. Jews generally hated Samaritans because of distinct cultural and religious differences. Furthermore, it was uncustomary for a man to talk to an unfamiliar woman in public. Jesus broke with convention but at the same time was culturally sensitive. He drew upon a common need, water, and formed the conversation around questions pertaining to universal needs rather than assertions. At the same time his approach was unconventional. Jesus breaks all conventions when it comes to ministry. Race, sex, and religion are no barriers to Jesus' kingdom-minded mission. Salvation was and is for ALL peoples, regardless of background or station in life. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (4:34). These words get to the heart of ministry when it is Spirit-driven and gospel-focused.

### **Head**

In last week's passage, Jesus encountered one of the religious elite. In this passage, Jesus encounters a foreign woman. Compare the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman to that of Nicodemus. What are the similarities, but what are the key differences?

Based on the woman's response to Jesus' claims, how would you "rate" her as to her openness to the gospel? How about the rest of the town?

"See that the fields are white for harvest." These words of Jesus in v. 35 are a vivid reminder that it is not up to us to assume the "when" and "where" of the appropriateness of the gospel. We are simply

called to lift our eyes and respond in obedience. What does that mean for you in your particular context (e.g. family, friends, neighbourhood, work, etc)?

While the religious leaders had a wrong view of whom the Messiah was to be, many Samaritans believed Jesus to be the Messiah once they heard from the woman and/or spent time with Jesus. What do you think were the factors that brought about widespread belief among the Samaritans?

What is the most important lesson you learn about evangelism from this passage?

### **Heart**

Verse 6 states that Jesus was "wearied...from his journey". Yet he engages in conversation about spiritual things with a foreign woman with a sordid past. In spite of his exhaustion, Jesus surmounted many obstacles in order to do the will of his Father. What lesson do you learn for yourself from this example?

As physically thirsty and hungry as he was, Jesus was not ultimately concerned about food and water. Where does your hunger ultimately reside – in the physical or in the spiritual? In other words, are you driven more by what you can gain for yourself or by God's kingdom? Write your reflections.

Jesus invested 2 full days in Samaria even though his goal was Galilee (see v. 1). Are you willing to be significantly inconvenienced for the sake of the gospel? Write your reflections.

In verses 36–38, Jesus indicates that there are ‘reapers’ and there are ‘sowers’, as well as different seasons for each. Has your experience been more of sowing or reaping? In other words, have you been planting the seeds of the gospel or introducing people to the Savior thanks to the work of other people and, ultimately, the Holy Spirit?

**Hands** (Note, a ‘Samaritan’ can be someone somewhat ‘foreign’ to your experience. Examples include, but are not limited to, a ‘new Canadian’ family, someone of another religion, an atheistic colleague, an under-resourced single-parent family, a LGBT neighbour)

*Light:* Ask God to introduce you to the “Samaritans” in your life so that you can begin to pray specifically for them.

*Moderate:* Respond to God’s leading in getting to know the “Samaritans” in your neighbourhood or place of business.

*Challenging:* Invite “Samaritans” into your home and begin to develop relationships with her/him/them.

### **Huddle**

1. Share with your group the most significant thing you learned from this week’s study.
2. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman, he didn’t decide to start a divorce ministry, even though she had been divorced five times. He instead identified her ultimate ‘thirst’. What do you learn about his approach that reveals the condition of human nature and the ultimate solution to sin?
3. The previous question is not meant to be critical of divorce ministries, or any other ministry for that matter. Rather, it’s intended to emphasize how the word of God, and the physical presence of the people of God, can meet people’s deepest needs and thereby transform relationships and cultures. How seriously are you responding to Jesus’ call to make disciples through the word of God and energy invested in relationships?
4. Make a list of some of the physical manifestations of sin that you see every day in person and/or on the news. Next to each item, attempt to discern what some of the underlying causes might be (realizing of course the ultimate cause). For instance, the Samaritan woman’s five divorces may have stemmed from a deep-seated insecurity and need to feel loved and accepted. But they ultimately pointed to a deep-seated emptiness (thirst) due to her alienation from her Creator.
5. How are you individually going to address the massive problem of emptiness in our world? What practical steps will you take individually and as a group?

## **Week 6 – Worthy Witnesses**

Passage: John 5:30-47

### Introduction

On July 16, 1918, Czar Nicholas II, his wife, and five children were executed by Bolsheviks in the early days of the Russian Revolution. In the years that followed there arose speculation as to the possibility that Anastasia, the youngest daughter, had survived. Part of this speculation was because a grave had been uncovered revealing the remains of the Czar, his wife, and three of their children. Anastasia's remains were missing. Several women in the decades that followed claimed to be Anastasia, in hopes of laying claim to her inheritance. Each person in her turn was rejected as evidence emerged which undermined their claims. Finally, in 2007, the mystery was solved and the case laid to rest as a DNA analysis of a second grave revealed conclusively that the grave contained the bodies of Anastasia and her younger brother.

Evidence is a crucial component in backing up any claim. This was no different for Jesus. In the midst of Jesus' growing number of followers, the opposition from the religious elite stiffened and his legitimacy was brought into question. In this passage Jesus unpacks for the religious leaders the plethora of evidence that points to him being the long-promised one – the Messiah.

### **Head**

According to this passage, what are the five witnesses that back up Jesus' claim that he is the promised one?

What does the first sentence of verse 30 reveal to you about Jesus' dependence upon the Father?

How was Jesus dependent upon the Father, and in what ways did it impact his perspective on ministry?

In John 20:21, Jesus states: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." How should this statement impact your perspective on ministry and the way you do ministry?

In this passage Jesus is warning the religious leaders who were rejecting his ministry. Jesus reveals in vv. 36-39 that it is possible to be well acquainted with the Scriptures and yet not be born again. What does this reveal about the dangers of head knowledge only?

## **Heart**

Society is full of sceptics when it comes to the claims of Jesus. How prepared are you to answer sceptics' questions?

How might you be better prepared?

Part of the ongoing proof of Jesus' claims is found in the life of the believer who is producing the fruits of the Spirit. Do you sense that people are seeing in your life the fruits of the Spirit? Write your reflections below.

Part of the religious leaders' problem was that they didn't "have his word abiding in" them (v. 38). They knew the content of the scriptures, but were blind to the truth of the scriptures. Do you struggle with this problem in any way yourself? In other words, is it a challenge for you to move what you know about scripture from your head to your heart? Write your reflections below.

## **Hands**

**Light:** If you are not reading the Bible daily, begin reading for 5 minutes each day. Ask a friend or family member to keep you accountable to this plan.

**Moderate:** If you are reading the Bible daily, begin spending at least 15 minutes per day reading and meditating on a passage.

**Challenging:** If you are consistently strong in your daily reading, begin memorizing 1 to 2 verses per week.

## Huddle

1. Discuss as a group the five witnesses that Jesus refers to in this passage. Discuss the validity and strength of each of these witnesses.
2. Have you ever read a passage of scripture (even numerous times), and then suddenly one day the truth of it dawns on you? Discuss.
3. It's easy to admit that we are dependent upon God, but to what degree do we recognize the degree of our dependency like Jesus did? Do you tend to be more self-sufficient and independent, or do you rely upon the Holy Spirit's daily direction in your life? Discuss.
4. Have you had a discussion with someone sceptical of the truth of Jesus' claims (or anything else in Scripture)? If so, relate your conversation.
5. There are three things that come into play when answering a sceptic: our knowledge of Scripture, the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives us, and the fruits of the Spirit seen in us. In which of these areas do you feel you are most deficient? Discuss.
6. Have each person in the group commit to one action step for the week in response to this week's study.

## Week 7 – Why Are You Following?

Passage: John 6:1-3

### Introduction

Pastor Mark Buchanan in his book, *Your Church is Too Safe*, points out the radical difference between a tourist and a traveler. Tourist literally means, 'one who goes in circles'. A tourist passes through an area as a consumer: sampling foods, acquiring souvenirs, seeing the sites. S/he returns from home, happy to have travelled yet happy to be home again. 'Traveller' on the other hand literally means, 'one who travails'. This person immerses him/herself in the language, culture, and customs, residing with the locals and acquiring their habits. A traveler labors, suffers, and endures.

In a similar sense there is a difference between coming *to* Jesus and *following* Jesus. In Matthew 15:29-31 Jesus has over four thousand people coming to him for healing or deliverance. He would appear to have a gigantic following. But in Matthew 16:24 he lays out what it truly means to follow him: "deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me." The rich young ruler found out the hard way, inquiring about the benefits of the kingdom without counting the cost. "Go and sell all of your possessions and give to the poor" was Jesus' response to him.

We each in our own way are faced with the same question: Why are you following? Or *ARE* you? Jesus has a way of penetrating our facade and exposing our hearts. As he does so, he leads us ever deeper into the true meaning and path of taking up your cross and following.

### **Head**

According to John 6:1-3, what two groups of 'followers' do you observe?

Read Luke 9:57-62. List below the three types of followers you read about in this passage.

Read Luke 14:25-33. In what way does this passage logically follow from the passage before it?

What do you learn about the cost of discipleship from this passage?

Taking these two Luke passages together, what does Jesus really mean by the expression 'hate' in 14:26?

How would you describe the degree of sacrifice that is required to be a true disciple of Jesus?

## **Heart**

Where do you see yourself in the groups of followers you listed above?

How do you presently feel about your relationship with Jesus? What are the strengths and what are the weaknesses?

List in order what you see as the top 3 priorities in your life.

How well does your use of time, talents, and treasure (i.e. money/wealth) align with this list?

What do you feel is the single greatest factor that hinders you in your commitment to following Jesus wholeheartedly (e.g. bad habit, nagging sin, difficult relationship, baggage from the past)?

## **Hands**

*Light:* Based upon how you answered the time/talents/treasure question, choose one thing from the list that you will ask God to help you to improve on.

*Moderate:* You have sensed God revealing something in your life that needs to either be abandoned or brought under submission to him. Pray for wisdom to realign your priorities and ask someone you know and trust to hold you accountable.

*Challenging:* God is calling you to a higher level of commitment. "Do you love me more than these?" You hear these words directed to you. Act prayerfully and in obedience to what you sense God directing you to do.

## **Huddle**

1. What was the biggest 'Aha' moment in your study this week?
2. What was the most significant challenge you faced in wrestling with the material?
3. When you held the 'follower mirror' up to yourself this week, what did you see? Explain.
4. Was there a significant breakthrough for you this week? If so, what was it?
5. How did you respond under the 'Hands' category?
6. In what ways can your group help you (and you help other group members) as you strive to live out what it means to 'take up your cross daily and follow Jesus'? Be specific and practical in your discussion. Have someone record your answers so that you can refer back to them in 30 days.

## **Week 8 – Hold On Loosely**

Passage: John 6:4-15

### Introduction

We can simply be part of the crowd, or we can stand out from the crowd. When we think of standing out from the crowd we usually think of making a name for ourselves by doing something extraordinary. And indeed, that is one way to stand out. But Jesus' expectation for standing out is counterintuitive. It's always based on self-sacrifice and humility.

In Adam Grant's book, *Give and Take*, he brilliantly illustrates this principle. Researching thousands of examples of how people have gotten ahead in the business world, he identifies the givers, takers, and matchers. In a startling discovery, the highest percentage of highly successful people is the givers, rather than the takers or matchers. They are the ones who consistently demonstrate generosity and self-sacrifice in the midst of some of the most competitive environments. Furthermore, the givers are also shown to be much happier and well-adjusted than the other two groups.

In the John 6 passage on the feeding of the five thousand, the story of the boy and his lunch illustrates this principle so well. An inconspicuous boy gives all he has to Jesus and a multitude numbering thousands is fed. More significantly this small sacrifice results not only in a fed multitude, but in a believing multitude.

### **Head**

To help solidify this passage in your mind, draw a timeline which includes an action item from each verse. For instance, your timeline should begin with v. 4 and include the fact that this event takes place on the Passover.

What do you learn from Philip and Andrew that you can relate to?

Jesus never rushes in with the teaching 'punch line'. How would you describe Jesus' approach to teaching his disciples? In what ways is it more effective than simply stating truths up front?

John's Gospel is the only Gospel that mentions the boy. Why do you think John might have included the origin of the loaves and fishes?

What does this event teach you about God's abundance in the midst of want and need?

Even though the crowds believed Jesus to be the promised 'Prophet' (v. 14), Jesus was able to see through their motives and chose to withdraw from them (v. 15). What do you learn about the motivation Jesus desires in his followers?

Have you ever sought to use Jesus for your own purposes? Explain.

### **Heart**

Write below a brief account of a time in which Jesus used the circumstances of your life to teach you an important principle/lesson.

Is there anything in your life that is causing you to doubt any of Jesus' promises? (Remember, Philip focused on the multitude and was overwhelmed by the need. Andrew focused on the meagre lunch and was 'underwhelmed' by the provision. Both were practical and, therefore, skeptical.)

We all tend to cling to something – wealth, children, reputation, retirement, possessions, loss, predictability, etc. Is there something you're clinging to that Jesus is asking you to let go of and entrust to him? Explain.

If the boy had held fast to his lunch, Jesus would still have fed the multitude. That said, however, what would the boy have missed out on? What do you learn from this incident?

Have you ever missed out on God's blessing because you were holding on to something? Explain.

## **Hands**

*Light:* Paul states in Philippians 2:13: "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Ask God to help you to will to do his work.

*Moderate:* God's asking you to let go of something in order for him to do something far greater than you could have imagined. Confess to God your doubt and your decision to release whatever he is asking you to release.

*Challenging:* With God's help you've released what you were holding on to and have given it to him. Now he's asking you to distribute his abundance to the multitude. There are a lot of people and it's arduous work. Ask him to help you clearly define what the task is and begin moving forward in obedience.

## **Huddle**

1. What one item from your timeline stood out to you the most and why?
2. Who could you relate to most in this account: Philip, Andrew, the boy, or the crowd? Explain.
3. Do you tend to err more on the side of practicality or trust? Explain.
4. Share the circumstance you recorded in question #1 under 'Heart' and the lesson Jesus taught you.
5. What is the one thing you have a tendency to cling to that at times holds you back in your faith journey?
6. Share the decision or commitment you made from your response under 'Hands'.

## Week 9 – What Am I Afraid Of?

Passage: John 6:16-20

### Introduction

Black Bart was a professional thief whose very name struck fear as he terrorized the Wells Fargo stage line. From San Francisco to New York, his name became synonymous with the danger of the frontier. Between 1875 and 1883 he robbed 29 different stagecoach crews. Amazingly, Bart did it all without firing a shot. Because a hood hid his face, no victim ever saw his face. He never took a hostage and was never trailed by a sheriff. Instead, Black Bart used fear to paralyze his victims. His sinister presence was enough to overwhelm the toughest stagecoach guard. (borrowed from *Today in the Word*, August 8, 1992)

Fear can emerge from both the known and the unknown. In this passage, the disciples are confronted with rough seas and a strong wind which no doubt evoked fear. This was the known – a fear perhaps they could more readily confront. The unknown was Jesus walking on the sea. This was not something they had experienced before, and they were frightened, wondering what to make of this impossibility and how to respond. Jesus speaks into the situation with, “It is I [or, ‘I am’]; do not be afraid”. These words immediately calmed their fears and gladdened their hearts. Receiving Jesus’ presence resolved not only their fears, but the difficulty of the journey – shore was immediately reached.

### **Head**

Compare the challenge in this story with the challenge in last week’s passage.

What is similar about the way the problems were resolved? What do you learn from this?

What was Jesus doing (v. 15) while the disciples were frantically rowing, trying to reach the other side of the sea?

After a long day of ministry, Jesus was being ministered to by the Father through prayer. How did he pay that forward to the disciples?

What do you learn about the importance of abiding in the midst of the seeming practical demands of life?

## Heart

Draw upon your own life experience and relate an incident or period of time in which you were confronted with a formidable challenge that evoked fear or anxiety in you.

How did you deal with this challenge in your life? What role (if any) did Jesus have in bringing resolution?

How real to you is the presence of Jesus in your life? Use a 1-10 scale as an evaluation tool.

When do you feel closest to Jesus? Explain why that is.

Do you have a sense of how to cultivate a closer connection with Jesus in your life? Write your reflections.

## Hands

**Light:** The psalmist declares in Psalm 56: 1-2: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?" What struggle in your life is causing anxiety and fear? Read this verse as a personal declaration.

**Moderate:** Paul states in 2 Timothy 1:7: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and of power and of self-control." One secret to conquering fear is not just avoiding it, but opposing it. Claim the promises of this verse and ask God's Spirit to fill you with love, his power, and the self-control to persevere.

**Challenging:** The verses above have been instrumental in your own life, and they continue to help you through your own bouts of fear and anxiety. You observe however those around you who are plagued with chronic fears and anxieties. They need you to exercise truth and grace by speaking these truths into their lives and circumstances. Follow God's directing today in connecting with someone whom he brings to your mind.

## Huddle

1. Have you ever noticed that following a breakthrough or after overcoming a challenge, you're soon after plagued with anxiety or fear? If so, relate an experience.
2. Why do you think this pattern is often the case?
3. How was this true of the disciples from this week's passage?
4. Do you think the disciples should have stayed back and prayed, or do you think they did the right thing? Discuss.
5. Relate a time in which you should have stayed and prayed and didn't, as well as a time in you should have acted and didn't. What lessons did you learn from each experience?
6. Whatever the disciples should have done, the truth is that they experienced fatigue and fear until Jesus stepped into the boat. Relate a particular circumstance in your life in which you experienced this for yourself?
7. Share the decision or commitment you made from your response under 'Hands'.