THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Come and SEE

Finding Yourself in the Gospel of John



RICK MELICK

BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE

How to Use This Book

Two men followed Jesus down a road one afternoon. He turned around and asked them, "What do you want?" They didn't really know, so they asked where he was staying. He answered with three words: "Come and see." Those three words run through the whole Gospel of John.

This book grew out of four Sunday mornings at Capitol City Church in the late summer of 2026, part of our *Jesus Speaks* series. Each week I asked you to do something with John, not just hear about it: read all 21 chapters, find your favorite story, then find the story that fits someone you love and tell them why. So many of you did it, and I heard about it all week long. Every message is still on YouTube, a QR code away. Watch first and then read, or read first and watch as a review. Either way, don't eat it like trail mix in a hurry. Pour it into your hand and look at what's there.

1

The Story

The illustrations bring back the stories I told on Sunday: the snacks, the high heels, the flies, the penguins. If you were there, you'll remember. If you weren't, you'll see why we laughed.

2

The Scene

Every chapter opens with the passage. Tap a blue Scripture reference anywhere in the book to read it online, but a paper Bible is best: circle, underline, write in the margins.

3

The Teaching

The heart of the sermon, trimmed so it reads well. Look for the gold **Key Verse** box and the speech balloon with the line to remember.

4

Talk It Over

Five questions that start with a story or a verse (explained, and one tap away) and end in your own life. No Bible background needed, and no right answers. If you've walked with Jesus for years, you'll still find something new to chew on.

5

This Week

One thing to do before next Sunday. Not five things. One.

6

Watch It

Scan the QR code with your phone's camera, or tap the button, to watch the full sermon on YouTube.

On your own

Read the whole Gospel of John first. It's 21 short chapters, and you can do it in one sitting. Then take one chapter of this book a week, and do the "This Week" challenge.

With a group

Your group will mix people who have followed Jesus for decades, people who just started, people starting over, and people still checking it out. That's a gift. If you know your

Bible well, use it to make room: ask, listen, and let the newest voice go first. Ask everyone to try reading John before you start. When you meet:

1. **10 min:** Everyone shares their favorite story in John so far, and why.
2. **15 min:** Read the chapter's passage aloud.
3. **25 min:** Work through "Talk It Over."
4. **10 min:** Share your "This Week" step and pray for each other.

With your kids

John wrote in simple words, about a fourth-grade reading level, full of double meanings. Read a sign aloud, look at the picture, and ask: "Who in this story needed Jesus? What did he do?"

At the back you'll find all seven signs in John, the seven "I am" statements, and the 21-week, one-color-a-day reading plan that changed my life.

THE HEART OF THIS BOOK

Find Yourself. Find Someone Close.

Every week of this series came back to two invitations. I want them to frame everything you read here.

1. Find yourself

Read John and find the story about Jesus that best reflects where you are on your faith journey right now. Maybe you're the one asking "What do you want?" Maybe you're lying by the pool. Maybe you're on the long walk home. It will be your favorite story because of what God is doing in your life this week, and next month it may be a different one. That's how it should be.

2. Find someone close

Then find the story in John that best represents or reminds you of someone very close to you: someone you work with, someone you text the most, someone you wake up next to, your kids, even your grown kids. Look for a chance to share it with them and tell them why. You aren't preaching at them. You're encouraging them with God's Word.

> *Read Scripture to find yourself and to find the people you love, not to win an argument or reinforce a bias you already have.*

Too often the only time we reach for the Bible is to prove a point. But God's Word is meant to change us (**James 1:22** ↗) and to build each other up (**1 Thessalonians 5:11** ↗). John told us exactly why he wrote it: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (**John 20:31** ↗). When you read this way, you train yourself to see your life, and the lives of the people closest to you, through

the lens of Scripture. And God may use you to say something to someone you love that they won't hear any other way.

Every chapter ends with a **Find Yourself · Find Someone Close** box to help you practice.

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PART ONE · HOW GOD SPEAKS

Pour It Into Your Hand

God likes to speak. He has said everything he wants us to know about himself in Jesus. So slow down and look closely.

CHAPTER 1

Come and See

John 1:35–51 · *Preached August 9, 2026*

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus doesn't hand us a sales pitch. He invites us to come and see, and he asks us to live a faith others can come and see too.

READ FIRST **John 1:35–51**

The First Disciples

35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw
Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning
around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It
was about four in the afternoon.

40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had
said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his
brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).
42 And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." 51 He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

The day after John the Baptist points to Jesus as "the Lamb of God," two of John's disciples start following Jesus down the road. Watch for:

- The question Jesus asks them, and the answer he gives (v. 38–39).
- What Andrew does first (v. 41–42).

- The new name Jesus gives Simon (v. 42).
- Nathanael's doubt, and the words Philip uses to answer it (v. 46).

Everybody wants to hear from God. Some of us are a little afraid to, I suppose, depending on what he might say. But I want you looking forward to it, looking for it, structuring your life around the ways he speaks.

We spent several weeks in **Hebrews 1:1–3** ↗ before we ever got to John, and here is what we found: we serve a God who likes to talk. He has spoken to us through his Son. Jesus is where heaven and earth intersect. If you want to know God, you look at Jesus, and to understand Jesus, you go to Scripture.

Other ways God speaks

But Scripture isn't the only way God speaks. I got a lot of questions about this, so here are three more.

Sometimes God speaks through people. You probably have someone in your life whose walk of faith you'd be happy to end up with. Every once in a while they say something, maybe even in casual conversation, that has a ring to it. You sense it might be the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes God speaks through circumstances. My pastor in high school used to say that if you let your circumstances define your faith, your faith will always be in crisis. I didn't like that when I was young. I understand it better the older I get. But God can still arrange people and opportunities to point you toward his will.

Sometimes God speaks through that still, small voice. In prayer, the Holy Spirit gives you a nudge: don't do that, do this, look again at that verse.

Whichever way it comes, the first thing you do is take it to the Word. Does the Bible support it? Is it wise? Does it sound like something Jesus would say? Because "follow your heart" is one of the worst pieces of advice anybody can give you. **Jeremiah 17:9** ↗ says the heart is

deceitful above all things. Your heart will take you for a long walk into the middle of nowhere and leave you for dead. The Holy Spirit won't.



One choice at a time

I grew up idolizing my dad's little brother, Ray. He was about fifteen years younger than my dad, more like an older brother to me. He started out as a sportswriter, covering college football, and he was good at it. When the internet started swallowing up newspapers, he landed in public relations, handling the press for a major company in the middle of a national crisis. And from there? Politics. The sportswriter ended up working for an elected official. It wasn't a straight line, but God kept placing him.

Years later we were sitting together at a family wedding. It was late in the night, and everybody was enjoying the party except, for some reason, Ray and me. We were sitting back watching like a couple of old Baptists. I'm not sure why. So I asked him, "How did your life end up the way it did? How did God lead you?"

He answered right away. "I prayed that God would only give me one choice at a time. If I had one choice, I knew I'd make the right one. If he gave me a bunch of choices, chances are

I'd make the wrong one."

That's probably an oversimplification of his walk of faith. But that day I started praying the same thing: *God, give me one choice at a time. Lead me through circumstances. Bring the people and opportunities into my life that show me what you want.* God can make a crooked path straight.

Pour it into your hand

This summer I drove seven and a half hours with my daughter-in-law, Lia. Joy makes sure nobody ever goes hungry, so she always sends me off with a gallon Ziploc bag full of snacks. My snacks are rather boring: protein bars, turkey jerky, little bags of mixed nuts, some probiotic mega-immune trail mix from Costco that comes in two colors. We look at the calories, the fat, and the protein. If it fits, it fits.

When I eat them, I tear off the top, pour the whole thing in my mouth, and eat it as fast as I can. There's a trash can Velcroed to the back of the passenger seat in my truck. The wrapper goes in, and I never think about it again. It's not for enjoyment. It's for substance. If I wanted to enjoy it, I'd be eating a Reese's.

Joy eats them differently. She tears the bag open carefully and pours the nuts into her hand like they're little treasures, little nuggets of gold. (She doesn't spill them in my truck. We've had that talk.)

Then she picks through them and looks at each one before she eats it. It drives me crazy. Everything in me wants to lean over and say, "Just eat it!" But I don't, because I've been married thirty-six years, and you learn things over time. You don't do that on a long trip. Especially at the beginning. I just watched and thought, *This is the weirdest behavior I have ever seen.*



My first thought: "Just eat it."

So I told Lia to help herself to any of the snacks she wanted. She opened the glove box, looked a little disappointed at what she found, and pulled out (guess what?) the mixed nuts. I watched out of the corner of my eye. She tore the bag open very carefully, poured them into her hand, and started eating them one by one, looking at each one.

My first thought was, *Just eat it.* My second thought was, *Wait a second.* If my wife eats them this way and Lia eats them this way, maybe I've been eating snacks wrong my whole life. Did you know that if you slow down, you can actually taste the difference between the things in there? Barely, but you can.

That's how we need to come to Scripture. On Sunday you get thirty or thirty-five minutes in one blast. Then too many of us throw the wrapper away. This week, pour it into your hand. Pick out the pieces. See which ones fit your life and what God may be saying.

Don't eat the Word like trail mix in a hurry. Pour it into your hand.

Jesus takes away sin

John the Baptist spent his whole ministry pointing at someone else. After about four hundred years of silence since Malachi, he showed up announcing that the Messiah was coming. A crowd gathered. Then one day he pointed: *There he is.* "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (**John 1:29** ↗).

So here's the first observation, the first thing to pick out of the bag: **Jesus removes sin.** When these disciples follow Jesus, they aren't doing him a favor. When you give Jesus your life, you aren't handing him all your talent and education and background. It isn't heroic. We desperately need a Savior because we are desperately sinful. The old system made atonement for sin over and over. Jesus forgives once and for all.

"What do you want?"

The next day, two of John's disciples heard him say it again, and they started following Jesus. Literally following, down the road. Jesus turned around and asked them, "What do you want?" It wasn't aggressive. It was a real question.



"What do you want?" (John 1:38)

It's a question you have to answer, and one you have to be ready to answer when people ask why you follow Jesus. What do you want out of life? What do you want to be known for? What do you want people to say at your funeral? Where do you find meaning, freedom, and peace?

The disciples kicked the can down the road. "Where are you staying?" And Jesus said three words that I believe shape the whole book of John:

> KEY VERSE
>
> *"Come," he replied, "and you will see."*
>
> **John 1:39**

That's the second observation: **Jesus gives spiritual sight.** John writes in the simplest words, about a fourth-grade level, but full of double meaning. Over and over he tells about someone who can't see physically, and then about people who can't see spiritually. They don't understand who God is, who they are, or the condition of their hearts. Then their eyes

are opened. These two spent the evening with Jesus, from about four in the afternoon, and probably all night. Wouldn't you love to have been at that campfire? By morning their lives had changed.

A new name

The first thing Andrew did was find his brother Simon. "We have found the Messiah." And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, essentially, *Nice to meet you, Simon. I'm not going to call you Simon anymore. You'll be called Cephas, Peter.*

Imagine if I met our pastor Brandon for the first time and said, "Hey, Brandon, nice to meet you. By the way, I'm going to call you Rob from now on." Brandon would say, "What's your deal, man?" But Jesus saw something Simon couldn't see. He named the person he had created him to be. Not a perfect person. A messy person who would fail, get back up, succeed, and fail again, and still hear, "Well done."

So here's the third observation: **Jesus has the authority to change your identity,** when you meet him and over and over as you walk with him.

When I ask who you are, most of us start with what we do for a living. I've worked in churches since my freshman year of college. I don't have any other appreciable skills, if this one even counts. But "preacher" isn't who I am. I'm a Christ follower, a husband, a father, a grandfather. Being a pastor is very important to me, but it's not who I am.

So every morning we begin again: *Lord, my life belongs to you. Who am I today?* When you retire. When you're fired. When a decision is in front of you. He knew you in your mother's womb (**Psalm 139:13–16** ↗), and his plans for you are specific to you. You find them only through Jesus.

Follow me

The next day Jesus found Philip and said, "Follow me." That's the fourth observation: **Jesus has the authority to invite you to follow him.** One of the most dangerous things any pastor or leader can do is get you following a person. People will always let you down. The longer you live in relationship with people, the more you find that they disappoint. You might follow someone who is following Jesus. But only Jesus never disappoints.

Can anything good come from Nazareth?

Philip, from Bethsaida like Andrew and Peter, found Nathanael. "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law… Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." They're all trying to describe him, and they don't quite have it yet. I love that these guys didn't know John was writing everything down. They aren't using church words. They're a little rough and raw. They're just like us.

Nathanael said, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" And Philip didn't argue. He said, "Come and see."

A come-and-see faith

That's the challenge for you and me: to live a come-and-see kind of faith. It takes humility, transparency, vulnerability, and truth. If you want to look better than you are, or holier than you are, please don't get involved in come-and-see.

The facts of the gospel matter. Jesus is God. He was born, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, rose again, and ascended. Our faith is built on those facts. In Bible college and seminary they taught us to present them almost like a sales pitch, and how to win the argument. But I've shared my faith with a lot of people over the years, and I've never debated one person into the kingdom. Following Jesus is shared life to life. It has to be seen, sensed, and felt, not just heard and learned.

And if you aren't real great at being a Christian, join the club. Don't compare yourself to the people around you. Compare yourself to Jesus. When I do that, I'm not very good at this. But I'm following. Just like Peter, I'm going to fail, and I'm going to get back up.

Christianity is meant to be shared life to life: the facts, seen in the flesh.

No secrets

When Jesus met Nathanael, he told him things about himself that no one could have known (**John 1:47–49**). And that's the last observation: **with Jesus, there are no secrets.**

The last time I dated anybody besides my wife was 1988, before dating apps. (I still date my wife.) Now you swipe right and build profiles. If I had to make one, I'd put my best foot forward. I'd get the lighting right, make sure the glare isn't coming off my head, and hide every red flag I have. Then if I finally met somebody, I'd hope there was enough good to outweigh everything else that comes along with Rick.

Or maybe we should put all the bad stuff right up front: a red-flag page. Click here to see all my quirks, peculiarities, and weirdness. If somebody makes it through that, you know it's going to be a good first date. I don't know. But here's my point.

Jesus already knows your red flags. He knows the good, the bad, the dirty, the disappointing. You don't have to wait for the other shoe to drop. He knows, he sees, and he loves you and accepts you anyway.

What's a pepita?

One more thing happened on that drive. It was the first time Lia and I had spent that much time together one on one, and I was trying to make a good impression. My son Nathan had given me the rules before we left: "Dad, don't grill her. Don't ask her any Bible questions." I told him, "I'm not going to do that, Nate. I'm a normal person." Somewhat.

So I was on my best behavior when she looked up from the snack bag, studying the package very carefully, and asked, "What's a pepita?"

"I don't know, Lia. I just eat them."

"Well, do you like them?"

I had no idea. I said, "Lia, I may have been eating something I don't even like this whole time. I didn't even know it was in there. You better Google it." So she Googled it. "Oh, it's a pumpkin seed." Awesome. It's just a pumpkin seed. I guess "pumpkin seed" was too many letters to fit on the front of the package.

(When I asked our church who knew what a pepita was, a bunch of hands went up. You all are so much smarter than me.)



My point: when you read John, you're going to find things like that. Things you didn't know were in there, and things you'll want to look up. Some of you have been taking it in on Sunday and throwing the wrapper away the rest of the week. Not this week.

Talk It Over

1. Rick gulps his snacks; Joy and Lia pour them into their hands and look at each piece. Which are you? **Psalm 119:105** ↗ calls God's Word "a lamp for my feet." What would change if you read the Bible, or anything that matters, the slow way?
2. Two strangers were tailing Jesus down a road. He turned around and asked, "What do you want?" (**John 1:38**). If someone you respect asked you that tonight and really waited, what would you say? What would you be tempted to say instead?
3. Uncle Ray prayed for one choice at a time. **Proverbs 3:5–6** ↗ promises that if we trust God instead of our own understanding, he will "make your paths straight." Does one-choice-at-a-time sound like relief to you, or like a cage? Why?
4. The first time Jesus met Simon, he gave him a new name, Peter, meaning "rock" (**John 1:42**), long before Simon acted like one. What label have you carried around for years? What do you hope Jesus would call you instead?
5. Nathanael was shocked when Jesus described him before they'd ever met (**John 1:47–49**). Imagine a dating profile with a "red flags" page up front. What would be on yours? How does it feel that Jesus has read it and is still interested?

Find Yourself · Find Someone Close

FIND YOURSELF

Which person in **John 1:35–51** is most like you right now? The two following at a distance? Andrew, running to get his brother? Peter, getting a new name? Philip, simply told "Follow me"? Or Nathanael, arms crossed, asking, "Can anything good come from there?"

FIND SOMEONE CLOSE

Who in your life is a Nathanael, skeptical and honest, wondering whether anything good could come out of church? Don't argue with them this week. What would it look like to just say, "Come and see"?

This Week

Read the whole Gospel of John, at least once. Pick your favorite story or miracle, the one the Holy Spirit connects to your life right now, and write down why. Then pick the story that best fits someone in your inner circle. Look for a chance to share it with them and tell them why.

Watch the sermon

Scan the code or tap below to watch “Come and See” on YouTube.

My notes

What stood out? What is God saying to me? Who came to mind?

CHAPTER 2

Where Do We Get Truth?

Matthew 3:13–17 · *Preached August 16, 2026*

THE BIG IDEA

We go to the Bible for what we believe and practice. That's why we baptize believers, by immersion, as a picture of death, burial, and new life.

READ FIRST **Matthew 3:13–17**

The Baptism of Jesus

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John
tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all
righteousness." Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment
heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and
alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love;
with him I am well pleased."

Jesus walks from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin John. Watch for:

- Why John tries to talk him out of it (v. 14).
- The reason Jesus gives (v. 15).
- Which direction Jesus goes "as soon as" he is baptized (v. 16).

- Where you see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (v. 16–17).

When I stand up here, on whose authority am I speaking? My answer is the Bible. That sounds like a Sunday school answer, but it isn't simple. Many faith traditions don't arrive at truth that way.

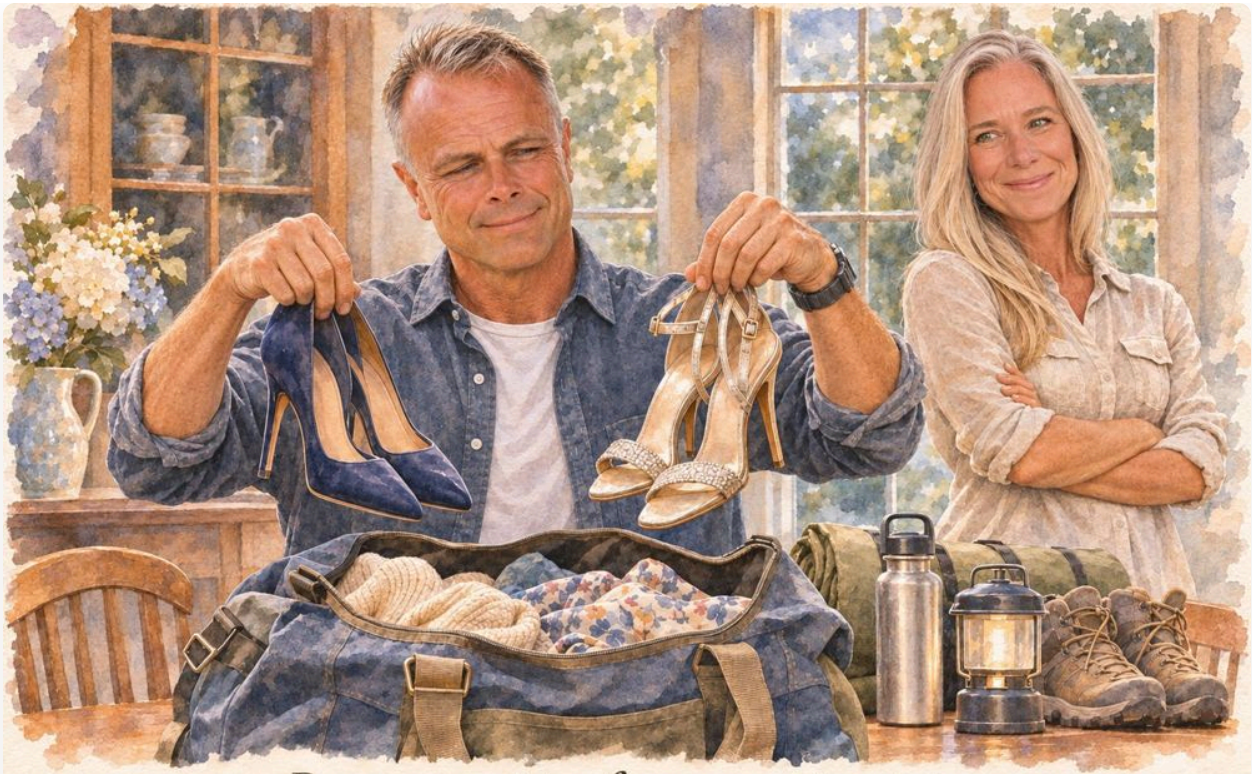
We baptized people in the first service that morning, and I believe we're heading into a harvest season like the fall a couple of years ago, when about thirty adults were baptized. Some of you have just decided to follow Jesus, and baptism is the next logical step. Some of you decided years ago and were taught about baptism differently. So this chapter is more informational than applicational. I'm not here to talk smack about any denomination or tradition. I just want you to know what we believe, why, and where it comes from.

You never know what you'll find

In August, Joy and I made two trips to Arkansas to see the kids and my sister. Before we left, we agreed: we'll be in the camper most of the time, so pack the bare necessities. Shorts, T-shirts, that's it. She nodded. "Right. Bare necessities."

When we got home, my parents were driving in from Arkansas to stay with us, and Joy was making beds. I decided to help by unpacking her duffel bag, which was still sitting on the dining room table. Now, I don't mean unpack it and hang everything up in her closet. I'm not that thoughtful. I mean take everything out, leave it folded in piles on the table, and carry the bag down to storage.

I was expecting shorts and T-shirts, the bare necessities we'd agreed on. And at the very bottom I found not one but *two* pairs of high heels. For a camping trip. You never know when you're going to need high heels when you're basically camping.



Bare necessities for a camping trip.

You never know what you'll find when you start unpacking. That's what happens when you read John with these questions in mind: What is God saying to me? What is he saying to someone close to me? You'll find things you didn't know were there.

Our authority

Here's what we believe the Bible teaches about baptism:

- **It comes after a decision to follow Jesus.** Immediately after is what I think best reflects the teaching of Jesus, but it could be years later.
- **It doesn't save you.** If baptism saved us, it would be a work. If we had to work for salvation, we'd have to work to keep it, and we would certainly mess it up.
- **It's a symbol.** It identifies you with Jesus and tells the church and the world you've made this commitment.
- **It's done by immersion,** because that's the biblical practice and the clearest picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- **We don't baptize babies,** because a baby can't choose to follow Christ.

If you disagree, I welcome the conversation. Come with Scripture, not opinion or tradition. And if this is different from what you were taught, ask your pastor or priest to show you where their practice comes from in the Word.

Baptism didn't start with John

You might be surprised: baptism didn't start with John the Baptist or with Jesus. It was already part of Jewish practice. When a Gentile wanted to convert to Judaism, there was a process. He ate a ceremonial meal, made an offering at the temple, and committed to the law of Moses. Men were circumcised, which would be a deal-breaker for a lot of guys if we put it in our membership class. And the last step was baptism.

The word simply means to wash, dunk, submerge, or immerse. Converts lowered themselves all the way under the water. It was a picture of leaving an old life behind and embracing a new one.

The Greek word wasn't a churchy word at all. It described a ship that sank at sea. People who dyed cloth talked about baptizing a garment. Later it even showed up in a pickle recipe. The confusion came when the New Testament was translated into English. Instead of translating it as "immersed" or "washed," translators carried the Greek word over as "baptized." So every time you read "baptized" in the New Testament, you could read "immersed."

John the Washer

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin, raised out in the wilderness, a little eccentric. They probably saw each other at family gatherings. Maybe Christmas and Easter. (Wait. They didn't have Christmas and Easter yet. Those came *after* Jesus. The first service caught that one right away.)

"Baptist" wasn't his last name. It was a nickname: John the Washer, John the Dunker. He was the first person we know of who baptized other people instead of them dunking themselves.

God called him to be a herald, the one who goes ahead of an important person, clears the potholes, and lets everyone know he's coming. After about four hundred years of silence, John announced it: the Messiah is near. Get ready.

(There's a funny story in **Acts 19** ↗. Years later, after Jesus had died, risen, and ascended, Paul found some disciples who had only received John's baptism. They were still waiting for the Messiah. Paul told them, "He already came!" and they were baptized in Jesus' name.)

Jesus came up out of the water

Then one day Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized. John tried to deter him. The word means back and forth, like ping-pong. "You baptize me." "No, you baptize me." Then John realized, *I'm arguing with Jesus. I should probably be quiet.*

Jesus said, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." His baptism did three things. It confirmed John's ministry. It set an example for every believer. And it marked the start of his three years of public ministry.

> KEY VERSE
>
> *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.*
>
> **Matthew 3:16**

Why did he come up out of the water? Because he was down in it. That's what the language says, and that's what baptism had meant for hundreds of years. And it just makes sense. We are buried with Christ in baptism (**Romans 6:4** ↗), dead in sin, and raised to walk in newness of life. What better picture than being totally under and then totally alive?

And look: the whole Trinity is there. The Son comes up out of the water, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father speaks: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



"This is my Son, whom I love." (Matthew 3:17)

Sprinkling and infant baptism

I want to explain where two common practices come from, so you can research them yourself. I'm not making light of anyone's experience.

Sprinkling doesn't appear anywhere in Scripture. It became an accepted practice through church councils long after the New Testament, most often dated to the Council of Ravenna in 1311. The reasons were practical: some people were too sick to be immersed, and in some places the water was cold. I understand that.

I once baptized an older woman with breathing problems who would not have come up the same way if I'd put her under; her doctor helped us find a safe way. I also baptized a twelve-year-old boy with severe autism who practiced for weeks but couldn't get his face under the water. He showed more courage than almost anyone I've baptized. Of course I baptized him.

But those were exceptions. Sprinkling as a regular practice comes from tradition, not from the Bible.

Different traditions arrive at truth in different ways. The Catholic Church holds Scripture together with church tradition and the teaching authority of the church. The Wesleyan tradition weighs Scripture most heavily but also tradition, reason, and experience. We try to let Scripture alone be our authority for what we believe and practice.

Infant baptism isn't in Scripture either. It became widespread in the centuries after the apostles, at a time when many babies died and parents were afraid for them. I believe the Bible teaches that until a child is old enough to understand sin, grace, and salvation, God extends a special grace. If they die, they are with Jesus right now. Some people never develop to the point where they can understand, and I believe the same grace covers them.

Some point to the Philippian jailer, whose whole household was baptized (**Acts 16:31–34** ↗). But how do we know there were infants in that house? We don't. And the thief on the cross was never baptized at all, yet Jesus told him, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (**Luke 23:43** ↗).

Infant baptism can cause real confusion. Parents wonder, *Did my child ever actually decide to follow Jesus?* That's the question you want answered. So we dedicate babies instead. Parents promise to raise their child to know Jesus, the church promises to help, and the child makes their own decision when they're ready.

All the way under

One of my best friends helped me plant a church. He was a solid Christian, the kind of guy whose faith I'd be happy to end up with. He was Presbyterian, sprinkled in college. I grew up Southern Baptist, and I was taught to be a little suspicious of Presbyterians. One of the hardest things for me as an adult is sorting out what was biblical from what my grandma taught me.

There was nothing wrong with my friend's faith or obedience. He did what he believed he was supposed to do. After sitting through several of our baptism services, he came to me and said, "If it's a symbol, the only thing that makes sense is going all the way under." I told him I'd been saying that for two years, but I was glad he was thinking it through. He and his wife both wanted to be baptized by immersion.



One of my favorite baptisms ever.

I've baptized people in the Pacific Ocean with sharks and rip currents, and I have plenty of baptism stories. One of my favorites is baptizing my friend and his wife in Norfork Lake, because they decided on their own. It took courage, and I respected it. If you were baptized as a believer by immersion, you don't need to do it again. If you were sprinkled as a believer, I'm not calling your experience invalid or saying you're a lesser Christian. I'm only asking you to ask God whether there's a clearer way to tell the world you follow Jesus.

Clarity, courage, respect, and how we best follow Jesus. That's what this is about.

Talk It Over

1. What's the "two pairs of high heels" in your life: something you were sure you'd packed light on, until somebody started unpacking?
2. When you were twelve, who told you what was true? **Acts 17:11** ↗ praises a group of people who heard Paul preach and then checked the Scriptures themselves to see if he was right. What would it look like for you to do that, even with this book?
3. Paul says baptism is like being buried with Jesus and raised to a new life (**Romans 6:4** ↗). When have you felt like you went all the way under? What did coming back up look like, or what would it look like?
4. Even John the Baptist tried to talk Jesus out of being baptized (**Matthew 3:13–15**). Jesus did it anyway, as an example. My church-planting friend changed his mind by watching people, not by arguing. Whose life has changed what you believe more than any argument could?
5. When Jesus came up out of the water, a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**Matthew 3:17**). That was before he'd preached a sermon or healed anyone. What would it do to you to believe God says something like that about you, before you've done anything?

Find Yourself · Find Someone Close

FIND YOURSELF

Jesus heard his Father say, "This is my Son, whom I love" (**Matthew 3:17**). Where are you in that story: still on the bank, wading in, or already coming up out of the water?

FIND SOMEONE CLOSE

Who do you know who is standing at the edge of a big step, like my friend was? How could you encourage them without pressure or debate, just with your own story?

This Week

If you haven't read all of John yet, read it. Then go back to the story that fits someone close to you: a coworker, a spouse, a child, an adult child. Share it with them. Not hellfire and brimstone, just encouragement from God's Word, and why it made you think of them. And if baptism is your next step, tell a pastor.

Watch the sermon

Scan the code or tap below to watch "Baptism" on YouTube.

My notes

What stood out? What is God saying to me? Who came to mind?

PART TWO · JOHN 4–5

Signs Up Close

John doesn't call them miracles. He calls them signs, because they all point to someone.

CHAPTER 3

What Are We Waiting For?

John 5:1–15 · *Preached August 23, 2026*

THE BIG IDEA

Sometimes Jesus heals. Sometimes he says no and gives grace instead. Either way, stop blaming and trust the one who walked right in.

READ FIRST **John 5:1–15**

The Healing at the Pool

1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now
there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called
Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great
number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. (*Verse 4 isn't in the earliest manuscripts. See "The pool of grace" in this chapter.*) 5 One who was there
had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and
learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you
want to get well?"

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water
is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man
was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, [10] and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

[11] But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

[12] So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

[13] The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

[14] Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” [15] The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Paul’s Thorn · 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

[7] or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. [8] Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. [9] But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. [10] That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In Jerusalem, Jesus walks into the pool of Bethesda, where crowds of sick and disabled people wait for the water to stir. Watch for:

- How long the man had been sick (v. 5).
- The question Jesus asks, and how the man answers it (v. 6–7).
- What day it was, and who gets upset (v. 9–10).
- Who the man trusts at the end (v. 14–15).

So, what's wrong with you? You may not need me to explain the question. You might already have a list. It might be the first thing you think about every morning.

All of us have something we wish God would change or take away. For some it's obvious. Others are good at hiding it way down deep, but if we're not careful, it spills out onto the people we love most.

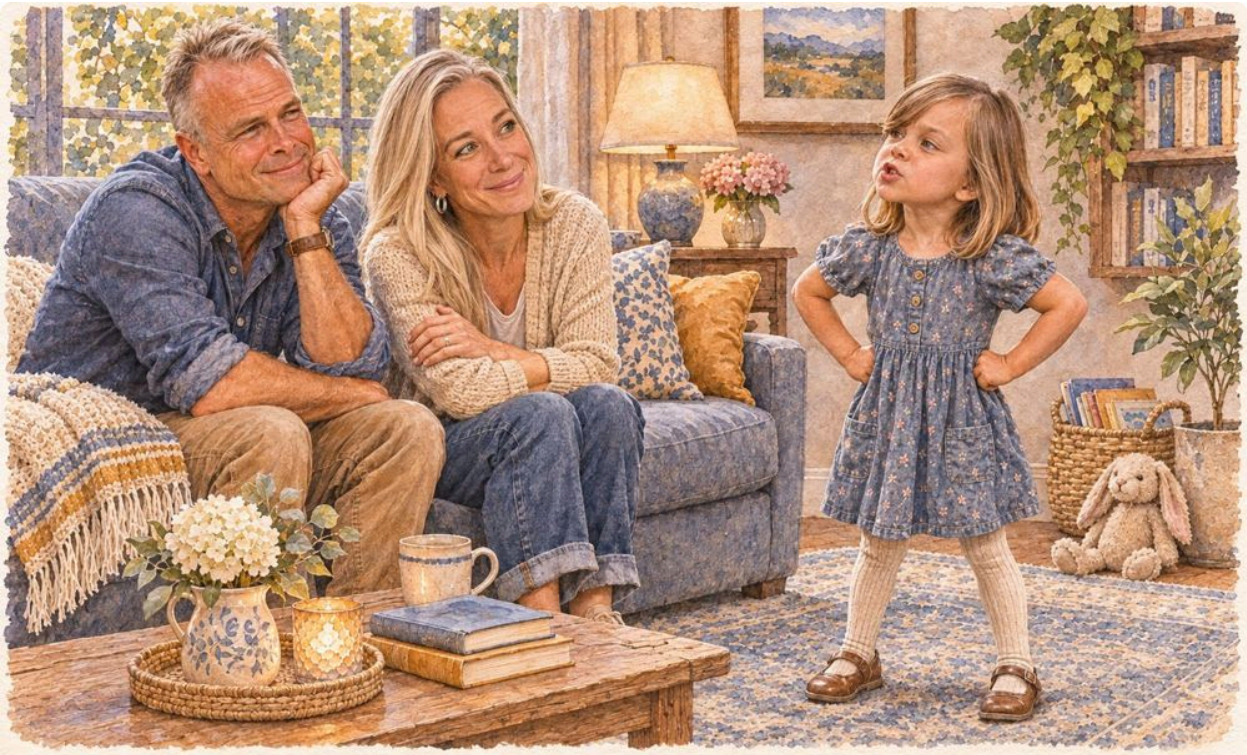
Paul's thorn

The apostle Paul had something wrong with him, and we don't know what it was. I believe that's on purpose, so none of us fills in the blank. Somebody else's problem always seems easier to deal with than our own. Some think it was his eyes. Some think it was the damage from beatings and shipwrecks. Many think it was loneliness and rejection; he was hurt by people he loved. Christians can be some of the meanest people on earth.

Paul was one of the most effective church planters who ever lived. He believed, maybe like you, that if God would just remove this thing, he could serve better. And life would be a little more comfortable, too.

So he asked Jesus to take it away. Jesus said no.

My granddaughter Emery is four and a half, and she knows the word "no" now. She doesn't like it one bit. If I tell her no, to her that means maybe. It's the opening of a negotiation, and she will patiently explain to me why what she wants is what she should have, and why it's the right way. And I do the very same thing with God all the time.



To a four-year-old, "no" means "maybe."

Paul asked a second time. No. He asked a third time. No. And then comes the part where faith comes in:

KEY VERSE

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2 Corinthians 12:9

If I were Jesus and something was hurting my wife, I'd take it away. If I had the power to take away your pain, I would. But I'm not Jesus. I don't see what he sees. We live in a world broken by sin. Some of what's wrong is what we did to ourselves, some is what others did to us, and some is just what we were born with. Jesus loves us enough not to always change what we ask him to change, because we're part of something bigger. And sometimes that's the way it is.

And sometimes it isn't.

Using Scripture to prove a point

My friend Dave said something to me this month: "Isn't it great to use Scripture to encourage somebody instead of using it to prove a point?" Now you're getting it, I thought. Then I realized I'd done it myself that very week. Joy told me not to tell this story. I asked the first service whether I should, and the vote was mixed. I'm telling it anyway.

We have flies at our house. Not because we're dirty. I promise you, we don't have a dirty house. We live across from one of those natural habitats the city creates, right in the middle of a neighborhood. I call it the wasteland. Your tax dollars pay for it to grow mosquitoes, bugs, and coyotes, and I think we live a little too close. Every time I open the door to let my dog out, the flies come in.

So I have a spring-loaded gun that shoots salt and kills flies. I love it. When Joy says, "Rick, get the gun," she isn't saying *get the gun*. She means the fly gun. I run and get it, and I'm on the hunt. My little Yorkie mix is right there with me, ears up. (We don't know who his dad is. It's a long story. He's with me.)

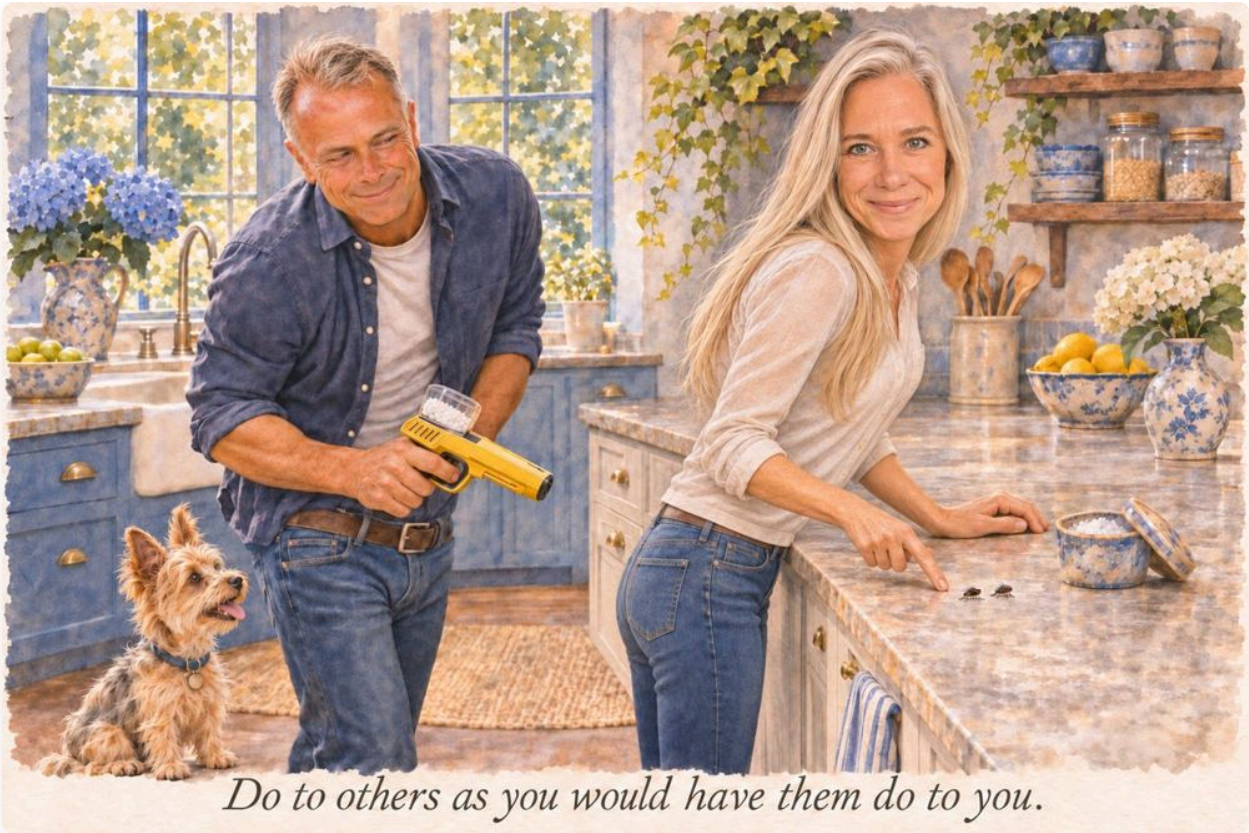
The other day there were two flies on the counter, and I want to explain this delicately because we are a family-friendly church. They had watched Netflix, and they were well into the chill. They were populating the earth. They were making more flies to inhabit the wasteland.

Joy said, "Shoot them!"

I said, "I'm going to wait a minute."

She said, "Then you'll have to shoot two of them, flying in different directions."

I said, "Joy, as the Scriptures say, do to others as you would have them do to you" (**Luke 6:31** ↗). So I waited. I shot them later. They're still dead. But I felt good about myself.



That's what we do sometimes. We weaponize Scripture. And that's exactly why I've been asking you to read John: so the Holy Spirit can use it to speak to you and connect you to the people around you.

Why John?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke start with the manger. John starts "in the beginning." Jesus was there. He was never created. He is God, and he spoke all things into existence.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke include exorcisms and parables. John has neither. John has seven miracles, and he calls them **signs**. A miracle points back to itself, to God's power. A sign always points to something else. In John, it points to someone: Jesus.

John wrote last, as an old man, decades after the others, possibly dictating it after his exile on Patmos. He had walked with the Holy Spirit for years and had watched what Jesus did in people's lives over time. So John fills in the heart. His Gospel is full of one-on-one encounters with Jesus. In the Upper Room chapters (**John 13–17** ↗), you don't find bread and wine. You find a basin and a towel. In **John 17:20** ↗, Jesus prays for all who would believe later. That means he prayed for you.

John uses "believe" around a hundred times, and always as a verb, never as a noun. Belief isn't a thing you put on a shelf at fifteen and pull back down at fifty. And John calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." I don't think that's arrogance. I think it's an old man looking back: *I don't know everything, but I know this. Jesus loves me.* His secret is in **John 15 ↗**: abide. Stick around. Don't quit, even when Jesus says no.

The pool of grace

John 5 is a turning point. If you were polling people about Jesus, his numbers were doing fine through chapter 4. In chapter 5 they start to drop, and the plot to kill him begins. This sign is where it starts.

Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem was a pool called Bethesda, which means "house of mercy" or grace. It was surrounded by five covered colonnades. John describes it like a place everyone would know. You know the one. But it wasn't a place of grace. It was a place of suffering, superstition, and false hope.

The blind, the lame, and the paralyzed lay there. Your Bible may have verse 4 in brackets or a footnote: an angel would stir the water, and the first one in would be healed. That line isn't in the earliest manuscripts. It was added later to explain what people believed. In fact, the pool was fed by underground springs that bubbled up from time to time.

Picture it: people with no families, no future, and no way to support themselves, left in a heap beside a pool. They were hoping an angel would stir the water and they'd be lucky enough to get in first. Superstition had crept into religion. Some believed a disability was punishment for a parent's sin, and that the sin would rub off if you got close, like cooties. Nobody wanted to go near that place.



He walked right in where nobody else would go.

Here's what Jesus did *not* do. He didn't stand at the gate and shout, "Try harder! You can do it! Just get up!" He walked right in, where nobody else would go. He found one man in his pain and got up close to a messy life that nobody could straighten out. That's what God wants us to know about himself.

"Do you want to get well?"

The man had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" That sounds like an obvious question. It isn't.

The man answered, "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." In other words: *The people who should have been there weren't. If they had loved me better, if God had put better people in my life, this wouldn't be happening.*

He blamed other people and circumstances. If I'm honest, I do the same thing. If my wife would change. If my kids would. Don't you see what I'm dealing with? Other people and other stuff can justify us, excuse us, and keep us stuck. And when something has been

around long enough, it becomes part of our identity. Some of us aren't 100 percent sure we want to let it go, because we might not know who we are without it.

Do you want to get well? Or is it easier to keep blaming?

The man thought he was answering a stranger who hadn't been paying attention. He was talking to the one person who could change everything. He only had faith in what he thought was possible. Jesus had something else in mind.

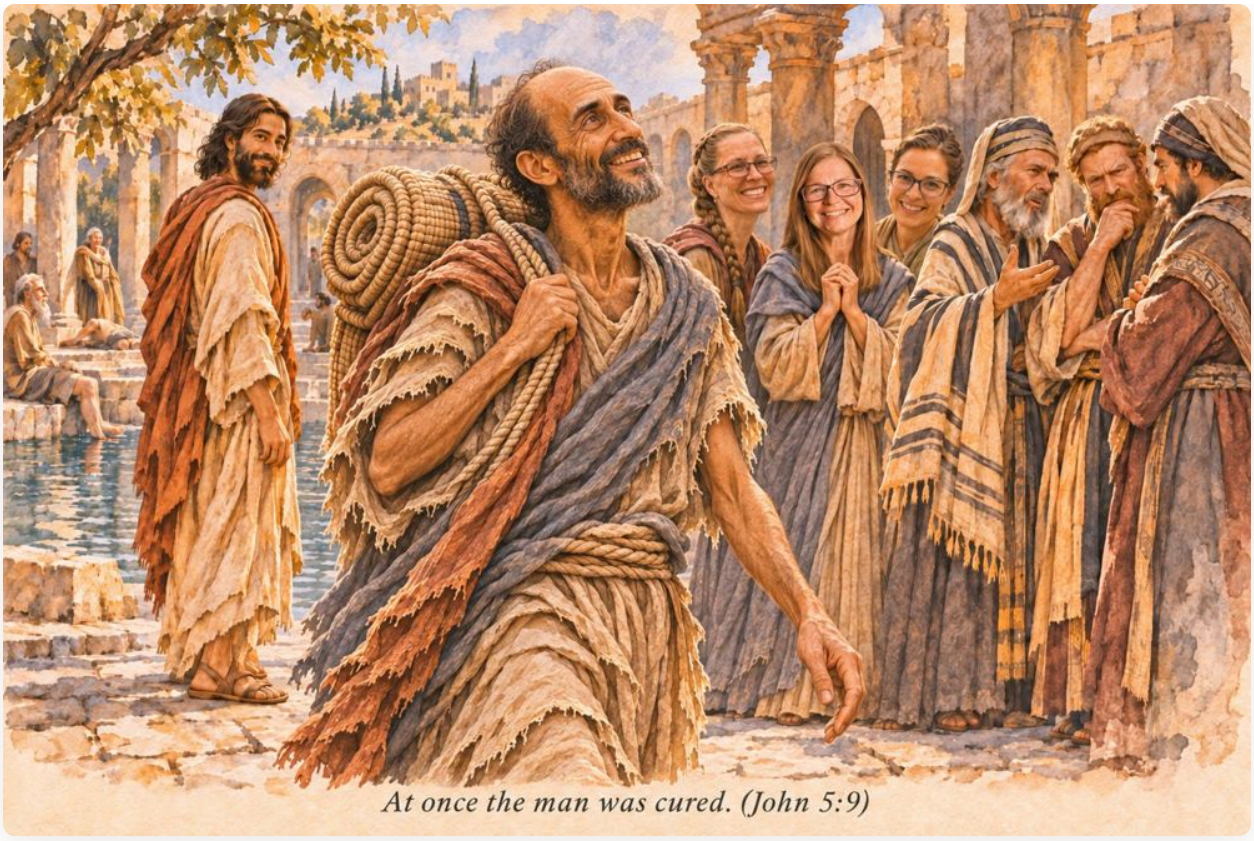
KEY VERSE

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

John 5:8–9

Standing between Jesus and a person

Then the music changes from hopeful to ominous. It was the Sabbath. The religious leaders confronted the man for carrying his mat. That rule wasn't even God's law. It came from the scribes' oral tradition, dozens of categories of rules they built around the commandment. "Who healed you?" He didn't know. Jesus had slipped away.



At once the man was cured. (John 5:9)

Here's a warning for all of us, especially Christians. When we use Scripture to win an argument or prove a point, what we're trying to accomplish can become more important than the person Jesus is trying to reach. Then we've put ourselves in the most dangerous place there is: between Jesus and the mission he came to accomplish.

Later Jesus found the man in the temple and said, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

Read it how you want. I like humor, and I think Jesus is joking. The religious leaders had told this man his whole life that he was sick because he was a sinner. Now here he is, up and walking. I think Jesus winks at him: *Hey, man, you better stop sinning, or something worse might happen to you.* Probably smacked him on the back and took off.

And the man chose to trust the one who came alongside him, not the group that put him there in the first place.

Just enough grace

Six years ago I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. The doctors said, "Good news, bad news. It's a pretty good kind of cancer. But you have a pretty bad case of it. You won't die from it, but you'll probably die with it." They took my thyroid, and I didn't ask God to put it back. It had failed me.

But because the cancer had spread to some lymph nodes, they treated it by keeping me in an extremely hyperthyroid state. My regular doctor would see my numbers and want to send me to the hospital. My cancer doctors said it was exactly where they wanted it.

It brought panic attacks out of nowhere: a racing heart, tunnel vision, my brain scrambling for no reason. That's hard for anyone. It's especially hard on a Sunday morning in front of a room full of people.

For about two years, I'd finish preaching, get in the car, and tell Joy, "I'm never doing this again. I quit." We joke that I resigned to my wife seventy-five or eighty times over those two years. I'm not exaggerating. Every week. "Can't do it, won't do it. I'm going to find something else to do."

Then by Wednesday, a message would start stirring in my spirit. Part of me would say, *Thank you, God.* Part of me would say, *Oh great, I have to do this again.*



I begged God to take it away far more than three times. He gave me just enough grace, every week, to barely get by. And what I learned is that his grace was all I needed. When I'm at my weakest, that's the best place for other people to see how strong God is. Some of you are carrying far heavier things right now: chemo, recovery, grief. This is the same principle, and it's available to you too.

Talk It Over

1. Paul begged God three times to take away his "thorn," and God said no (**2 Corinthians 12:7–9**). If you made a list called "What's wrong with me," what would you put at the top? Is there one thing you would never say out loud?
2. To a four-year-old, "no" means "maybe." God's answer to Paul was, "My grace is sufficient for you." Who or what are you still negotiating with after you've already heard no? What would "enough" look like?
3. A man had been lying beside a pool for 38 years when Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" (**John 5:5–6**). Is there something you've lived with so long that you're not sure who you'd be without it?
4. Instead of saying yes, the man said, "I have no one to help me" (**John 5:7**). Fill in the blanks honestly: "Things would be different if _____ would just _____." What could you do if that person never changes?
5. Paul ended up saying, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (**2 Corinthians 12:10**). Rick told his wife he quit about eighty times and showed up the next Sunday anyway. Where has your weakest moment turned out to show someone something good?

Find Yourself · Find Someone Close

FIND YOURSELF

Are you more like Paul, asking God for the third time to take something away (**2 Corinthians 12:8–9**), or the man at the pool, explaining why it's someone else's fault (**John 5:7**)? Be honest.

FIND SOMEONE CLOSE

Who close to you feels stuck, maybe for years? Instead of telling them to try harder from the doorway, how could you walk in and sit with them the way Jesus did?

This Week

Name one person or circumstance you've been blaming. Write it down, then write underneath it: "My grace is sufficient for you." Pray it every day this week, and take one small step you've been waiting for.

Watch the sermon

Scan the code or tap below to watch "What Are We Waiting For?" on YouTube.

My notes

What stood out? What is God saying to me? Who came to mind?

CHAPTER 4

What If It's Really Important?

John 4:46–54 · *Preached September 20, 2026*

THE BIG IDEA

A prayer request is what we ask God to do. A promise is what he has already said he will do. Walk home on his promises.

READ FIRST **John 4:46–54**

Jesus Heals an Official's Son

46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine.
And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. 47 When
this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and
begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

48 "Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never
believe."

49 The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

50 "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live."

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. 51 While he was still on the way, his
servants met him with the news that his boy was living. 52 When he inquired as to
the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the

afternoon, the fever left him."

53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed.

54 This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Jacob Wrestles With God · Genesis 32:22–31

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27 The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

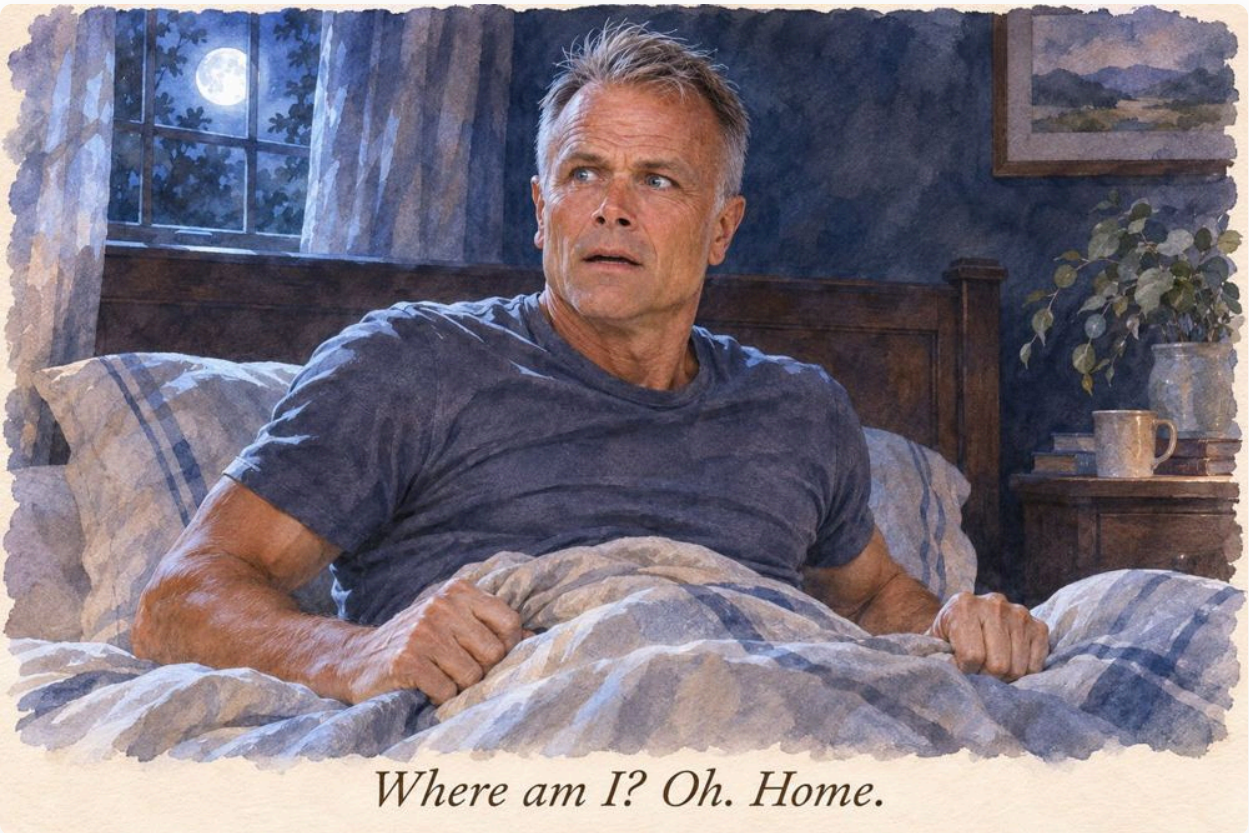
31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

A royal official travels from Capernaum to Cana to beg Jesus to heal his dying son. Watch for:

- What the official asks Jesus to do, and what Jesus does instead (v. 47–50).
- The phrase that describes the man's faith (v. 50).
- The exact time the fever left (v. 52–53).
- Who believes by the end (v. 53).

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night and not known where you were?

This August, Joy and I drove almost 4,000 miles: about fifty hours behind the wheel on three trips, sleeping in a camper, a cabin, my son's house, and our own bed. The week we got home, I woke up in the middle of the night with a startle. It was dark. *Where am I right now?* Do you ever do that? Forget what room you're sleeping in? Or is it just me? Is it a sign things are starting to slip up here? It took a couple of seconds, not hours. Then: *I'm home. I'm finally home.* It felt really good.



I want you to orient yourself in Scripture, to find yourself in John. But orienting isn't enough. **James 1** ↗ says someone who looks into the Word and walks away unchanged is like someone who looks in a mirror and forgets what he looks like.

The mirror

My grandson Roecker is one, and he was born in style, with soccer-player hair. Broccoli hair. You know the look the seventh- and eighth-grade boys have, sides short and curls on top like my grandma used to wear? He was born with it. My daughter-in-law is a hairstylist, and she is constantly trying to smash his curls down with product. It doesn't work. That hair has its own free will.

Roecker loves to look in the mirror. He waves and says, "Da-da-da!" because right now everything is "dada." I'll say, "Roecker, say Bapo," and he'll say "Dada" and laugh at me, because he knows more words. Those are just the ones he chooses to say. But he has never once looked in the mirror and said, "Oh no, my hair's messed up." He's a kid. Kids don't do that.



He never once worries about his hair.

You and I would have to be crazy to look in the mirror and think, *There's nothing I would change.* If it isn't the hair, it's the nose hair sticking out the side. I look in the mirror and see my dad looking back at me. There's nothing wrong with that, but he's 80, so it's a little startling. That's how I want you to come to the Word: not only to find out where you are, but to find what God wants to change in you. If you stay the same every week, you're missing the point. Following Jesus is a walk.

Too familiar

We pick up the story right after the woman at the well. Jesus had two great days in Samaria, where many believed. Then he went back to Galilee, near his hometown, the place that knew him as fifth-grade Jesus, the kid down the street. Jesus said a prophet has no honor in his own hometown. They just wanted the show.

This was where he had done his first sign. Here's how that went: Jesus went to a small wedding in a small town. His mom said, "Jesus, save the wedding." Jesus said, "I'm here to save the world." His mom said, "Okay," and left. Then Jesus saved the wedding. And then he saved the world. Now the hometown crowd wanted more wine.

There's a subtle point here: you can become too familiar with Jesus. You've heard the stories so many times they don't affect you anymore. I've studied the Bible as a pastor since 1989. Every Monday I still ask, "Lord, what are we going to learn this week?" The meaning of the Word doesn't change, but I do. Every time I come back, I'm in a different place.

A Hail Mary

So Jesus was back in Cana. A royal official whose son was sick in Capernaum came to find him. Capernaum was about eighteen miles away. To us that's a quick drive across town. For them it was about an eight-hour walk, or three hours if you were rich enough for a chariot.

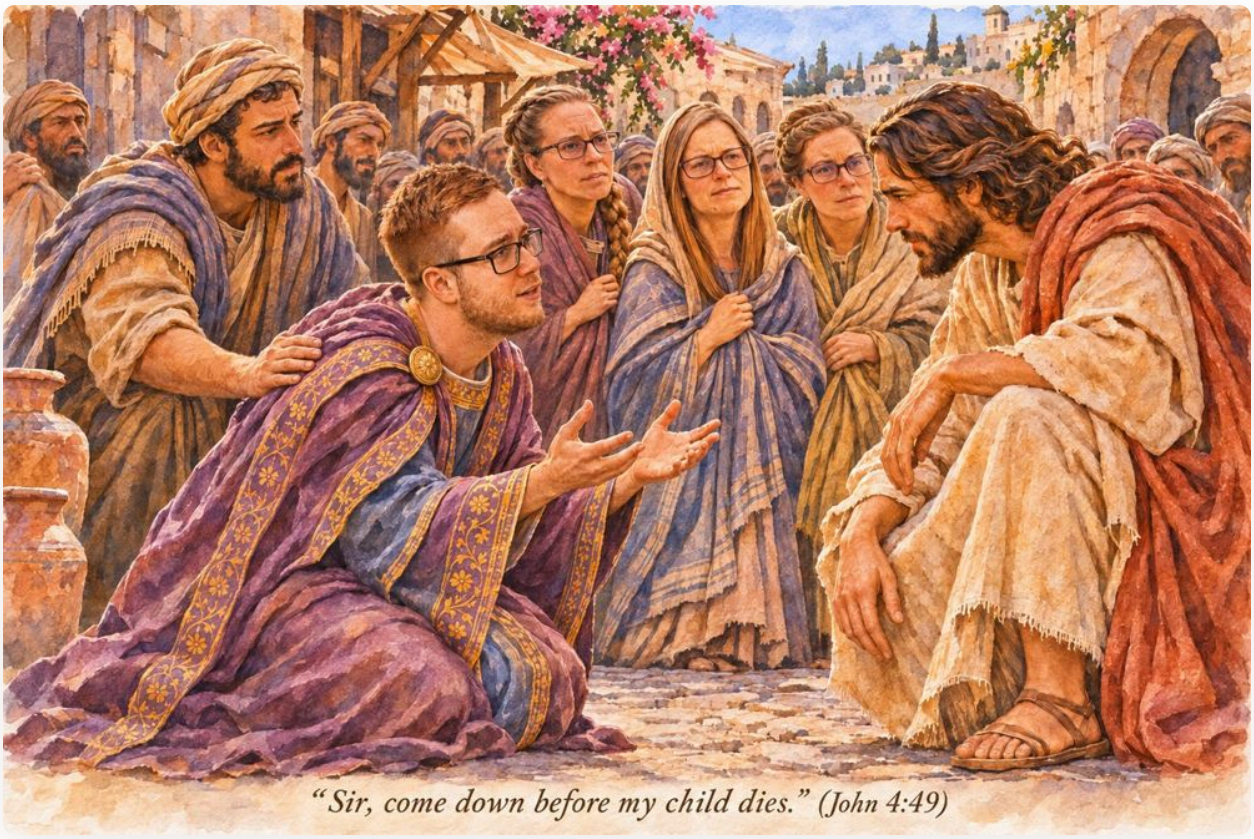
This man probably served Herod Antipas, one of the bad Herods. He had every resource available: the best doctors, soldiers, servants. And one day he looked into his hands and realized he had nothing that could save his little boy. The word John uses is personal. My little boy is dying.

So he threw a Hail Mary. I want more background than John gives us.

Maybe Mrs. Nobleman said, “You’re going to go get Jesus. We’re out of options. We’ve heard he can do things.” Maybe he said, “I’m not leaving. If I go, our son might die while I’m gone, and he needs me here.” And maybe she said, “You’re going to die if you don’t go get Jesus.” I don’t know.

But something made him leave his dying son and go find a carpenter’s son who had only done one sign anyone knew of. Begging in public would have been humiliating. People would have been whispering.

Jesus said, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.” The man didn’t get distracted. “Sir, come down before my child dies.” It made sense to him that Jesus would have to be there in person.



“Sir, come down before my child dies.” (John 4:49)

Jesus simply answered, “Go. Your son will live.” That’s the sign. Jesus didn’t go with him. He didn’t change his plans. And look at what the man did:

KEY VERSE

"Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

John 4:50

The walk home

Here's something a couple of people pointed out to me between services. Jesus spoke at one in the afternoon, but the man didn't arrive home until the next day. I would have jumped in my chariot and floored it. But taking Jesus at his word gave him the confidence to wait. Maybe he spent the evening listening to Jesus. Maybe he finally slept, for the first time in days. We don't know.

On the road the next day, his servants met him. "Your boy is living!" When did he get better? "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." It was the exact hour Jesus had spoken. And he and his whole household believed.



"Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him." (John 4:52)

I want you to find yourself on that walk home. He hadn't seen a miracle yet. He just believed Jesus and walked. And we are all on a walk home. From the moment we're born, we begin to die. Even Jesus lived on a timeline toward home, but he never got so focused on the destination that he forgot the people and the purpose along the way.

The walk home is where we lose faith. It's where fear takes over, frustration fills us, and faith falls by the wayside.

A request is not a promise

A prayer request is something we ask God to do. But a prayer request is not a promise. Your will and my will are not necessarily God's will. A promise is something God has already said he will do.

If you base your walk on whether your prayer requests get answered, fear and frustration will follow you. If you ground your walk in the promises of Jesus, you'll never veer off course. I'm a pretty good guy, and I figure that whatever I'm praying for, God surely agrees with me. That right there shows how sinful I am, to think I have the mind of God because I'm convinced. I don't.

A prayer request is what I ask. A promise is what he already said. Walk home on the promises.

Jacob's limp

You may not know Jacob, but you know his boy Joseph, the guy with the bathrobe of many colors. Jacob started life badly: a dysfunctional family, bad parenting, and a brother who was a hairy psychopath. On top of that, his name meant "heel grabber." He was a con man, a liar, one of those shifty guys you couldn't quite trust. He got his brother Esau's birthright for a bowl of soup in a weak moment.

Then he fell for a girl and worked years for her father to marry her. On the wedding day the bride was veiled. The vows were said, the veil came off, and it was her sister. Jacob's reaction was basically, "Hard pass." Too late. The ceremony was done. The deceiver had been deceived, the liar lied to, the con man conned. He ended up working seven more years and going home with two wives.

Years later, Jacob was heading home to face his brother, who was coming with four hundred men. He sent his family and everything he owned across the Jabbok River and was left completely alone. That night a man wrestled with him until daybreak and wrenched his hip. Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man gave him a new name: Israel, "because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome" (**Genesis 32:28**).



He was limping because of his hip. (Genesis 32:31)

As the sun rose, Jacob was limping, and he limped the rest of his life. That limp reminded him of the day he stopped living for himself and started depending on God. Some of you have a limp from choices you made or things done to you, some your fault and some not. The limp isn't so bad if it reminds you of the day you chose to depend on God.

Promises you can take to the bank

- **Rest.** "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest… and you will find rest for your souls" (**Matthew 11:28–30** ↗). I read it like this: *rest for your restless soul.*
- **Victory.** "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (**John 16:33** ↗). Sometimes the kids don't come home. Sometimes the diagnosis is what you feared. This is where our requests and his promises collide.
- **Presence.** "I am with you always" (**Matthew 28:20** ↗). John adds that the Holy Spirit lives within us (**John 14:16–17** ↗). You will never be alone.
- **Peace.** "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (**John 14:27** ↗), in the middle of circumstances that would otherwise bring panic.
- **Home.** My favorite: "I am going there to prepare a place for you" (**John 14:2–3** ↗). He's taking us with him.

So present your requests to God (**Philippians 4:6–7** ↗). Present them, present them, present them. But cling to his promises. They're the stepping-stones that lead you home.

Penguins on the ice

My favorite bird is the penguin. I love the original *Happy Feet*, about a penguin everyone wanted to be one thing when he was created to be another. I once watched a nature documentary about emperor penguins at the edge of an iceberg. They had to get into the water to eat, to grow, to live. But there could be a shark down there. So the whole colony shuffled forward and back at the edge, waiting for somebody to get pushed in.

Finally one went over the edge. I saw it. Penguins don't have knees, but this one did. He went down. Then they all peered over the edge to see whether he was going to get eaten. He didn't. He started swimming and found a fish, and the rest of them said, "The water's fine!" and jumped in.



Somebody has to jump first. Maybe it's you.

That's what I see in our church. So many of us are right on the edge. We know we need to jump, to trust God and take the next step, but we're afraid. Maybe it's forgiveness you need to give or ask for. Maybe it's something to stop or something to start. Maybe it's making worship a weekly priority, or trusting God with your giving, since Jesus said your heart and your money go together. Whatever the Holy Spirit has been nudging you toward, jump in.

Talk It Over

1. James says that reading God's Word without changing is like looking in a mirror and walking away forgetting what you look like (**James 1:23–24** ↗). When was the last time something you read actually changed what you did the next day?
2. A powerful official with money, soldiers, and the best doctors walked about eight hours to beg a small-town carpenter for help (**John 4:46–47**). What would it take for you to admit you're out of options?
3. Jesus said, "Go, your son will live," and the man "took Jesus at his word" and started home with no proof (**John 4:50**). What do you think went through his head on that walk? What do you do while you wait without knowing?
4. Think of something you asked God for that you were sure he'd agree with. Then read one promise Jesus did make: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (**John 16:33** ↗). Is that promise comforting to you, frustrating, or both?
5. Jacob wrestled all night, walked away with a limp, and got a new name (**Genesis 32:24–31**). Then there are the penguins shuffling at the edge of the ice. What jump have you been circling for months? What limp might you be afraid of getting?

Find Yourself · Find Someone Close

FIND YOURSELF

Where are you on the walk home in **John 4:46–54**: still begging, already walking with no proof, or hearing the good news on the road?

FIND SOMEONE CLOSE

Who in your life is waiting on news, a diagnosis, a prodigal, a job? Which promise of Jesus could you send them this week, with a note that says you're praying?

This Week

Pick your penguin step: the one thing God has been nudging you toward. Resolve to do it. Then text someone: "On Wednesday, check whether I followed through." Write one promise of Jesus on a card and carry it with you all week.

Watch the sermon

Scan the code or tap below to watch "What If It's Really Important?" on YouTube.

My notes

What stood out? What is God saying to me? Who came to mind?

THE END, AND YOUR TURN

Seven Signs

John 20:30–31 ↗ · *A guide for reading John*

*John didn't write everything Jesus did. If he had, he said, the whole world couldn't hold the books (**John 21:25** ↗). He chose seven signs so that you would believe. Here they are. Two of them are in this book. The other five are waiting for you.*

1. **Water into wine**
   A small wedding in a small town. **John 2:1–11** ↗
2. **The official's son healed from a distance**
   "The man took Jesus at his word." Chapter 4 of this book. **John 4:46–54**
3. **The man at the pool of Bethesda**
   "Do you want to get well?" Chapter 3 of this book. **John 5:1–15**
4. **Feeding the five thousand**
   Five loaves, two fish, twelve baskets left over. **John 6:1–14** ↗
5. **Walking on the water**
   "It is I; don't be afraid." **John 6:16–21** ↗
6. **The man born blind**
   "I was blind but now I see!" **John 9** ↗

7

Lazarus raised from the dead

"I am the resurrection and the life." **John 11** ↗

Your two stories

Now that you've read John, write them down. Write right on the page.

The story in John that best reflects where I am right now

Why

The story in John that reminds me of someone close to me, and who

When and how I'll share it with them

I would love to hear what you found. Share it with me, Pastor Brandon, or Pastor Jared. It's one of the most encouraging things we get to hear.

Seven "I am" statements

Seven times in John, Jesus tells us in his own words who he is. They connect to the signs by theme, not by a dotted line. See how many connections you can find.

I am the bread of life
John 6:35 ↗

I am the light of the world
John 8:12 ↗

I am the gate
John 10:9 ↗

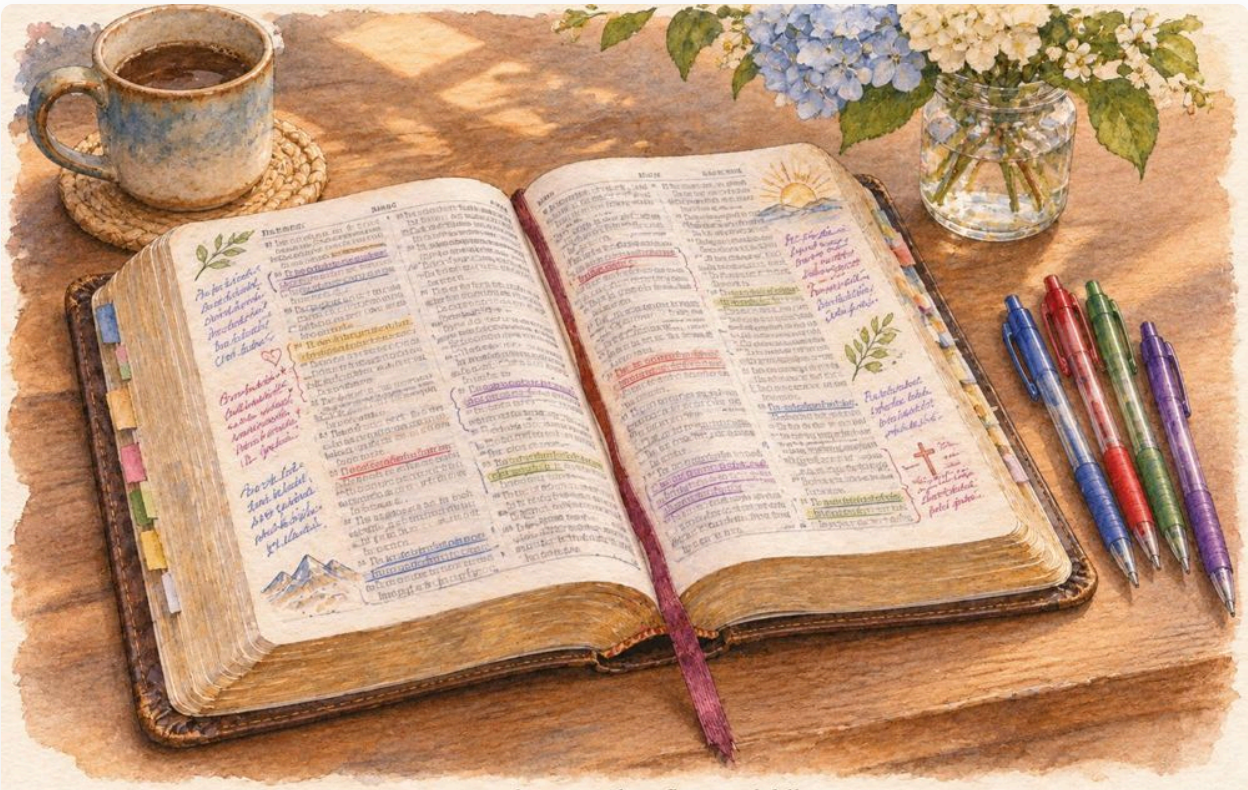
I am the good shepherd
John 10:11 ↗

I am the resurrection and the life
John 11:25 ↗

I am the way, the truth, and the life
John 14:6 ↗

I am the true vine
John 15:1 ↗

The 21-week, one-color-a-day plan



A quiet place to seek, reflect, and follow.

Years ago I did one of the best spiritual exercises of my life. I read John chapter 1 every day for six days, Monday through Saturday, with a different colored pen each day. Each day I wrote in the margin what I thought God was saying to me or teaching me.

Scripture has one meaning, but it has a lot of applications, and my life was a little different each day. At the end of the week I could look back and see all six colors in the margins. The next week I moved to John 2. It took 21 weeks. I keep meaning to do it again. Maybe we can do it together.

Week 1 John 1	**Week 2** John 2	**Week 3** John 3	**Week 4** John 4	**Week 5** John 5	**Week 6** John 6
Week 7 John 7	**Week 8** John 8	**Week 9** John 9	**Week 10** John 10	**Week 11** John 11	**Week 12** John 12
Week 13 John 13	**Week 14** John 14	**Week 15** John 15	**Week 16** John 16	**Week 17** John 17	**Week 18** John 18

Week 19	Week 20	Week 21
John 19	John 20	John 21



Will you come and see?

Father, thank you for every person holding this book. Keep us humble. Make us transparent in our strength and our weakness, and honest as we share the difference you make in our lives. Bless those who are struggling, those who feel like failures, those facing decisions, those in a health crisis, and those who feel pretty good right now. Give them peace, freedom, purpose, and a hope that's supernatural. Help us take you at your word on the walk home, and live a faith others can come and see. In Jesus' name, amen.

AT THE BACK

Scripture

- *Every passage referenced in this book*

Tap any Scripture reference in the book to come here. Tap "Back to page" to return to the exact spot you left.

Genesis 32:24–31 NIV

24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man
saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his
hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it
is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 The man
asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 28 Then the man said, "Your
name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with
humans and have overcome." 29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied,
"Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. 30 So Jacob called the place
Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." 31 The
sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 4 · Talk It Over*)

Genesis 32:28 NIV

28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have
struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 4 · Jacob's limp*)

Matthew 3:13–15 NIV

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to
deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 Jesus
replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then
John consented.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 2 · Talk It Over*)

Matthew 3:16 NIV

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven
was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 2 · Jesus came up out of the water*)

Matthew 3:17 NIV

17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well
pleased.”

↩ Back to: **Chapter 2 · Talk It Over** · **Chapter 2 · Find Yourself · Find Someone Close**

John 1:35–51 NIV

35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus
passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" 37 When the two disciples heard him say
this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What
do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"
39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying,
and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. 40 Andrew, Simon
Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had
followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him,
"We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus
looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which,
when translated, is Peter). 43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding
Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town
of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses
wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth,
the son of Joseph." 46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael
asked. "Come and see," said Philip. 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said
of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." 48 "How do you know
me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig
tree before Philip called you." 49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of
God; you are the king of Israel." 50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you
under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." 51 He then added, "Very truly I
tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on'
the Son of Man."

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 1 · Find Yourself · Find Someone Close*)

John 1:38 NIV

38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 1 · Talk It Over*)

John 1:39 NIV

39 “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 1 · “What do you want?”*)

John 1:42 NIV

42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 1 · Talk It Over*)

John 1:47–49 NIV

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” 48 “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49 Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

↩ Back to: **Chapter 1 · No secrets** · **Chapter 1 · Talk It Over**

John 4:46–47 NIV

46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And
there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. 47 When this man
heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to
come and heal his son, who was close to death.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 4 · Talk It Over*)

John 4:46–54 NIV

46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And
there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. 47 When this man
heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to
come and heal his son, who was close to death. 48 "Unless you people see signs and
wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." 49 The royal official said, "Sir, come
down before my child dies." 50 "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live." The man took
Jesus at his word and departed. 51 While he was still on the way, his servants met him
with the news that his boy was living. 52 When he inquired as to the time when his son
got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him."
53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him,
"Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed. 54 This was the second
sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

↩ Back to: **Chapter 4 · Find Yourself · Find Someone Close · Seven Signs**

John 4:50 NIV

50 "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and
departed.

↩ Back to: **Chapter 4 · A Hail Mary · Chapter 4 · Talk It Over**

John 5:1–15 NIV

[1] Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. [2] Now there
is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and
which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. [3] Here a great number of disabled
people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [5] One who was there had been an
invalid for thirty-eight years. [6] When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had
been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" [7] "Sir,"
the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.
While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." [8] Then Jesus said to
him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." [9] At once the man was cured; he picked up
his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, [10] and so the
Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids
you to carry your mat." [11] But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick
up your mat and walk.' " [12] So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick
it up and walk?" [13] The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had
slipped away into the crowd that was there. [14] Later Jesus found him at the temple and
said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to
you." [15] The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made
him well.

↩ **Back to page** (*Seven Signs*)

John 5:5–6 NIV

[5] One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. [6] When Jesus saw him
lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him,
"Do you want to get well?"

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 3 · Talk It Over*)

John 5:7 NIV

[7] "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

↩ Back to: **Chapter 3 · Talk It Over** · **Chapter 3 · Find Yourself · Find Someone Close**

John 5:8–9 NIV

[8] Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." [9] At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 3 · "Do you want to get well?"*)

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2 Corinthians 12:7–9 NIV

[7] or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. [8] Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. [9] But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 3 · Talk It Over*)

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2 Corinthians 12:8–9 NIV

[8] Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. [9] But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 3 · Find Yourself · Find Someone Close*)

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2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV

9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 3 · Paul’s thorn*)

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2 Corinthians 12:10 NIV

10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

↩ **Back to page** (*Chapter 3 · Talk It Over*)



Rick Melick

Rick Melick has served as senior pastor of Capitol City Church in Des Moines, Iowa, since November 2016. A pastor and church planter for more than three decades, he planted congregations in San Anselmo, California, and Cotter, Arkansas, and has served churches in Texas, Tennessee, and Washington.

In 2017 he founded City Serve DSM, a nonprofit that partners with Capitol City Church to bring businesses, schools, and community organizations together to serve the teachers, first responders, and military personnel of Greater Des Moines. He also serves as a chaplain with the Iowa State Patrol.

Rick studied at The Criswell College and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, and did doctoral work at San Francisco Theological Seminary and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He and his wife have been married thirty-six years. They have two grown sons, two daughters-in-law, and grandchildren who call him Bapo.

> *Rick wants what will be most important to him five minutes after he dies to be most important to him every day.*

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