

SACRED  
QUESTIONS



*A Transformative Journey through the Bible*

365 DAYS  
*of responding  
to God*

{ K E L L Y E F A B I A N }

God designed Scripture to speak to us, to speak to you and to me, to speak to each of us—daily and deeply. We often don't hear from God daily or deeply because we are afraid to listen to the sacred questions God's Word provokes in us as we read. Instead of listening to those sacred questions, we too easily skirt and suppress and slide away from the deep questions the Bible provokes. But Kellye Fabian designs this book with pastoral sensitivity and theological depth to permit those questions, then to listen to those questions, and finally to seek answers by listening to what God is saying in his ever-new-and-fresh Word. *Sacred Questions* is designed to promote sacred faith seeking sacred understanding.

SCOT MCKNIGHT, Julius R. Mantey Chair of New Testament, Northern Seminary

Kellye has been a friend for years, and I've had the privilege of being guided by both her questions and her prayers many times in those years. Kellye's intelligence and depth and creativity shine through every page, and I'm so delighted that her gentle and wise questions and prayers have now been captured in a format that will allow so many people to experience their transformative power.

SHAUNA NIEQUIST, author of five books, including *Present over Perfect* and *Savor*

A significant crisis in contemporary Christianity is our difficulty relating Scripture to life. What we lack isn't information but integration. Kellye Fabian knows the power of good questions. They invite honesty, wonder, and a loving response to what is most real. If you have the courage to ask the questions in this book, it will change your life.

MARK SCANDRETTE, director of ReIMAGINE: A Center for Integral Christian Practice; author of *Free, Practicing the Way of Jesus*, and *Belonging and Becoming*

Kellye's love of the Bible and spiritual disciplines shines bright everywhere she goes—including here!

MARGARET FEINBERG, author of *Taste and See*

Each morning for the past four years, Kellye Fabian's devotions have been feeding my soul, reminding me how to slow down, guiding me into prayer with the Father, and helping me walk deeply with Jesus and receive all that the Holy Spirit has for me. When you dive into *Sacred Questions*, come expecting to be

pastored and empowered, guided and equipped through the use of Scripture, story, prayer, and reflection on how to live your one and only life in response to our great God.

STEVE CARTER, speaker, author of *This Invitational Life*

When a smart woman chases after the Lord, a book like this is born. Kellye ushers us right into the throne room, with grace and humble confidence. This book is a lifetime companion.

TRICIA LOTT WILLIFORD, author of *You Can Do This*

*Sacred Questions* is unique in the “devotional” space. Where many devotionals leave you pondering the words of the author, *Sacred Questions* leaves you pondering God’s Word—and God himself. Kellye Fabian is a masterful guide who takes you into God’s presence, then gracefully removes herself and leaves you alone with your Father.

KEITH FERRIN, author, speaker, biblical storyteller

I’ve always been drawn to reflective people who ask probing questions, which is why I fell in love with *Sacred Questions* immediately. Kellye Fabian is a seasoned and trusted guide for anyone who wants to enter a holy dialogue with God that will transform them from the inside out.

STEVE WIENS, pastor, author of *Beginnings* and *Whole*

The questions we ask define our future. Like large doors swinging on small hinges, the questions we ask unlock new journeys, holy conviction, and unexpected destiny. Kellye Fabian has a unique gift with the most perceptive and illuminating questions. In her book *Sacred Questions*, Kellye will gently guide you on a journey that will inevitably lead you to new doors of discovery.

DARREN WHITEHEAD, DMin, senior pastor of Church of the City and author of *Holy Roar* (coauthored with Chris Tomlin)

S A C R E D  
Q U E S T I O N S

{ K E L L Y E F A B I A N }

*A Transformative Journey through the Bible*



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TO SISTER FLORENCE,  
*you saw my gift for writing.*

TO MY SWEET JAMIE,  
*you're the Rory to my Lorelai.*

TO STEVE,  
*your love heals me.*

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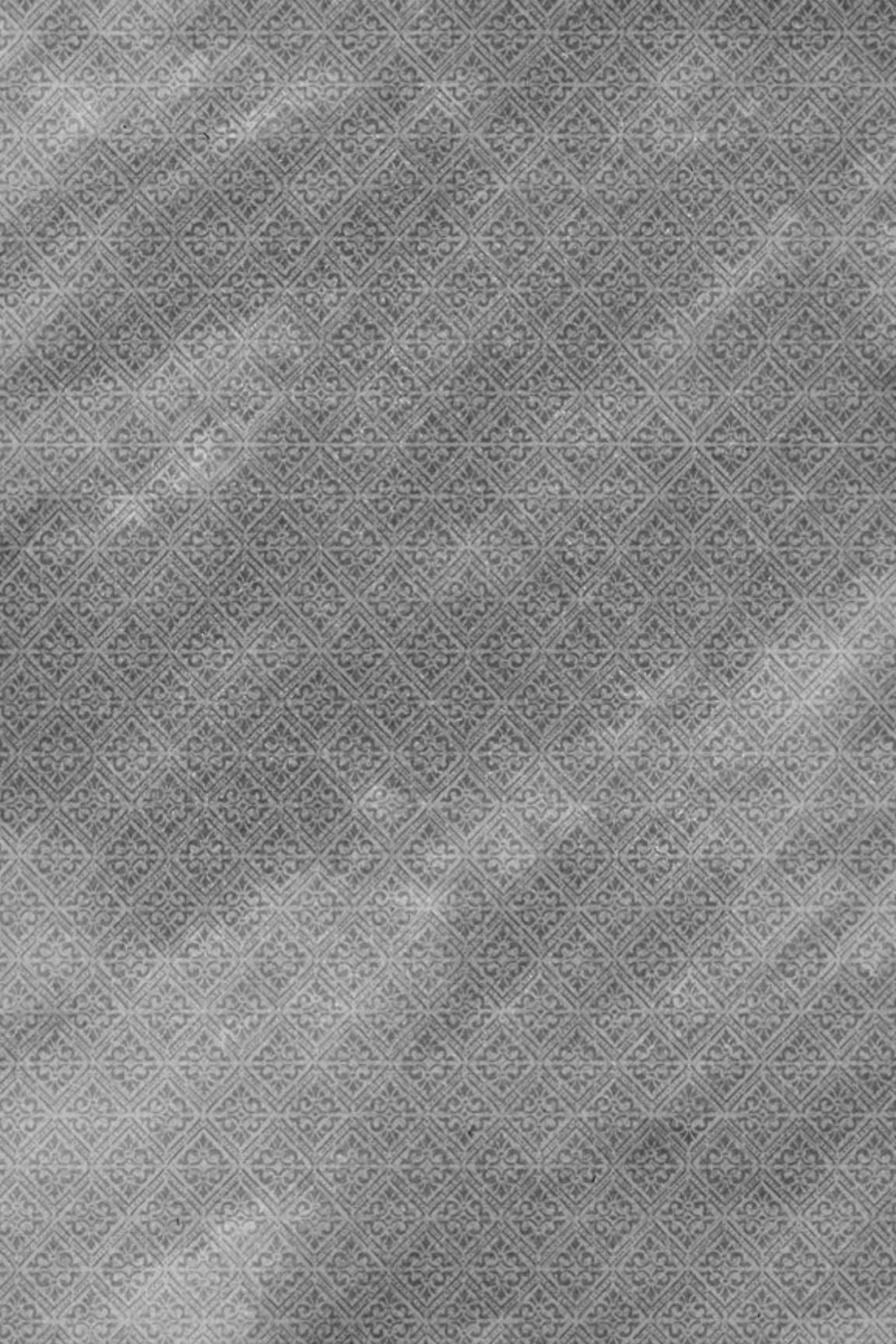
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# Introduction

*Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart.*

RAINER MARIA RILKE

*God's Word has not done its complete work until it evokes an answer from us.*

EUGENE PETERSON

**MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY** began with a question: “Why don’t I have faith?”

I wrote those words in my brand-new Bible in 2005, right in the middle of what I now call “the dark years.” “Why don’t I have faith?” was not an intellectual question; it was a cry for help.

Of course, from an outsider’s perspective, my life probably looked fine. I was a successful trial lawyer at a firm in Chicago. I owned a house and car. I flew first class all over the country. I drank the best wine. I had all the things that defined a “successful life.” But on the inside—in my heart and mind—I was a mess. Just a couple of years earlier, I had gotten divorced. My heart was broken—not because of anything my husband had done, but because I just didn’t know who I was or what my life was supposed to be about. I had a beautiful daughter, and I loved her more than I thought possible. But those years were filled with loneliness and emptiness. I was on a desperate (and often destructive) search to discover who I was and if I was worthy of being loved.

Perhaps because I had spent years asking questions as a lawyer, my first thought about faith was a question. I couldn’t shake that thought after reading Romans 12:3: “By the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (NIV). If the Bible was true (and at that point I didn’t know if it was) and God had given each person some amount of faith, why hadn’t I received any?

Without knowing it, my question began what would become the most transformative spiritual practice of my life: asking questions as I read the Bible and



sitting with those questions in God's presence, not as a way to receive answers but as a way to be changed. In other words, in that first question, I wasn't really seeking an answer to why I didn't have faith. I was seeking to know God, to believe him, and to trust him—to *have* faith.

As I reflect back, I can see that God has used this practice of asking questions to show me who he is, allow me to see myself more clearly, break patterns of sin, grow in forgiveness and love, and join his work in the world. Most days, I'm walking around with a question in my heart and mind that arose during my time reading Scripture that morning. For example, *Why did that verse cause such anxiety in me? What's getting in the way of my forgiving that person? Why did those words stand out so much when I read them? What people and practices in my life help me live with more joy and patience?*

I want to invite you into this daily practice of asking sacred questions. It has been transformative and life giving for me, and I think it can be for you, too. Asking sacred questions opens a holy dialogue with the loving, ever-present God who is at once holding all things together and dwelling within us. Instead of doing all the talking, we learn how to listen for what God is saying. We all long for space to hear him, to allow ourselves to receive his love, and yet we often either fail to make the time or are unsure how to do it (and maybe a little of both). Jesus calls us to come to him in our weariness, with our burned-out selves and broken hearts. He calls to us in our greatest triumphs and most devastating mistakes. Yet in our busyness, our brokenness, our pain, or even in just the fullness of life, we resist this invitation. We forget that he desires us to remain in him, and we forget to turn to him. We forget we are in a relationship. We forget that it is in God that we live and move and have our being.

My prayer is that this book will help you respond to Jesus' invitation over the next year—that you can enter into a holy space in which you become attuned to his voice as he encourages, loves, trains, comforts, heals, challenges, and transforms you. And I pray that responding to his invitation allows you to draw closer to him and live every day with your heart and eyes lifted to him, and your hands outstretched to the world.

#### HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book is divided into twelve primary sections (and one each for Christmas and Easter), each covering a topic that shapes our relationships with God, ourselves, and others. In the broadest sense, the book will lead you on an intentional journey of transformation from the inside out.

The first four topics—responding to Jesus' invitations, opening to God's love, knowing the one you follow, and finding your identity in Christ—are meant to ground your heart, mind, and soul in the truth that in Christ, you are unendingly loved and unshakably secure.

The next two topics—abiding in God in a world of distractions and being formed by what’s true—begin the outward movement, as you will confront the things that try to dislodge you from the truth that you are loved and secure. These sections help you learn to rest in God even as the world tosses you around.

The next five topics—loving like Jesus, opening your eyes to the Kingdom of God, aligning with the Holy Spirit, lamenting your pain and the pain of the world, and worshiping God for the beauty of creation—turn your eyes, ears, and heart outward to join in the redemptive work God is doing in the world.

Finally, in the last primary section—for the sake of others—you will allow your life to speak and reflect your relationship with Jesus, doing good in the world with the Holy Spirit’s help and inviting others into the life Jesus has granted you.

The sections vary in length, each including seven to fifty-six days of daily practices. My recommendation is to start at the beginning and take this formative one-year journey. But if a particular topic resonates deeply with your current season, you can engage the sections in whatever order you choose.

#### THE DAILY PRACTICE

Reading the Scripture is vital for transformation as you walk through this book. The words of God are not study material but food for your soul. Read slowly, savoring the words as if they were coming from the mouth of a close friend or spouse. You may be tempted from time to time to skip the Scripture and go straight to the questions. Of course, any engagement with God matters, so be gracious to yourself. But no human words carry the transformative power of God’s words. Although the questions in each section are provocative and compelling, they are transformative only if the power of the Holy Spirit carries them into your heart. So if you are short on time or attention on a particular day, just read the Scripture and trust that even if you are distracted or uninterested, God will continue to work in you.

The Scripture each day is taken from the New Living Translation, but you can use whatever version of the Bible you are most comfortable with and in whatever form best suits you. Maybe you need a physical Bible on your lap, or perhaps you prefer to use an app or website such as YouVersion or BibleGateway. In most sections, the Scripture reading is followed by a short paragraph designed to increase understanding of the context of the verses or to highlight a particular aspect of the passage.

Asking sacred questions each day is meant to help you reflect on what God revealed as you read. Examine your thoughts, attitudes, and actions in his presence and with his guidance. The questions are meant not to merely increase your biblical knowledge but to reveal the state of your soul, allowing you to partner with God as he shapes, heals, and transforms you.

Finally, prayer is a vital component of each daily practice. Spend time opening yourself to God’s guidance, thanking him, asking him to transform you in

the ways you need and to send you out into the world as an embodiment of his love and grace.

#### **A WAY TO BEGIN**

Perhaps you have been walking with God for a long time and know exactly how to bring your body, mind, and heart into awareness of his loving presence. Wonderful! In that case, let your holy conversation begin! If you're not sure how to dive in or you're looking for a new approach, here's a guide.

##### ***Place***

Find one place where you can sit every day and seek to hear from God. Maybe it's your favorite chair or spot on the couch. Maybe it's the train on your way to work. Or maybe it's a plastic chair at a coffee shop. What matters is that, as much as possible, you go to the same location each day. You will find that this consistency will allow you to be more open and less distracted. You will spend less energy adjusting to the environment and have more brain space to engage with God. In Luke 22:39, we learn that it was usual for Jesus to go to the Mount of Olives to pray. Jesus practiced going to a particular place to meet with God.

##### ***Posture***

Approach your daily practice with an open heart and open hands. So often we read the Bible with an agenda. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but this should not be the *only* way we read the Bible. When we do this, we are seeking to impose our plans or are looking for specific information.

A slight shift in your posture and approach can lead to much more than answers and information. As you sit down to reflect on the Scriptures each day, open your hands. Showing with our bodies an openness to God's agenda and his desire for us, we are more likely to experience transformation.

##### ***Plan***

Before you begin this book, decide how you will read through it. Will you begin with the first section and read straight through, or will you start with a segment that feels relevant to a particular struggle you're navigating? Each daily practice should take about twenty minutes. You can always spend more time on a certain daily practice depending on how deeply you allow yourself to engage the sacred questions. Of course, you don't need to be overly rigid if you feel God leading you elsewhere, but it's good to have a plan so you're spending more time reading and reflecting and less time deciding what to read.

##### ***Presence***

Our lives are filled with distractions, and some of us find it a challenge to be fully present with another person. Our smartphones have become appendages,

so we are constantly tempted to be somewhere other than where we are. If you can, allow yourself to be fully attentive to God and expectant about encountering his presence. This may end up being the most challenging aspect of engaging in this daily practice. How do you stay present, and what do you do when you get distracted? Here are four helpful tips:

1. **Harness your phone.** If you'll be tempted to check Facebook, your email, the weather, or your calendar, put your phone in another room and silence your ringer.
2. **Set a timer** to ring when your allotted daily practice session is almost up. This allows you to be fully present in your daily practice without having to keep checking the clock.
3. **Download distracting thoughts.** Keep a note card next to you, and when tasks and to-dos flood your mind, write them down so you can return to them later.
4. **Re-center yourself.** If you notice that your mind has run away and you're no longer present, simply re-center yourself by speaking the opening prayer for the day or another short prayer that helps return your attention to God.

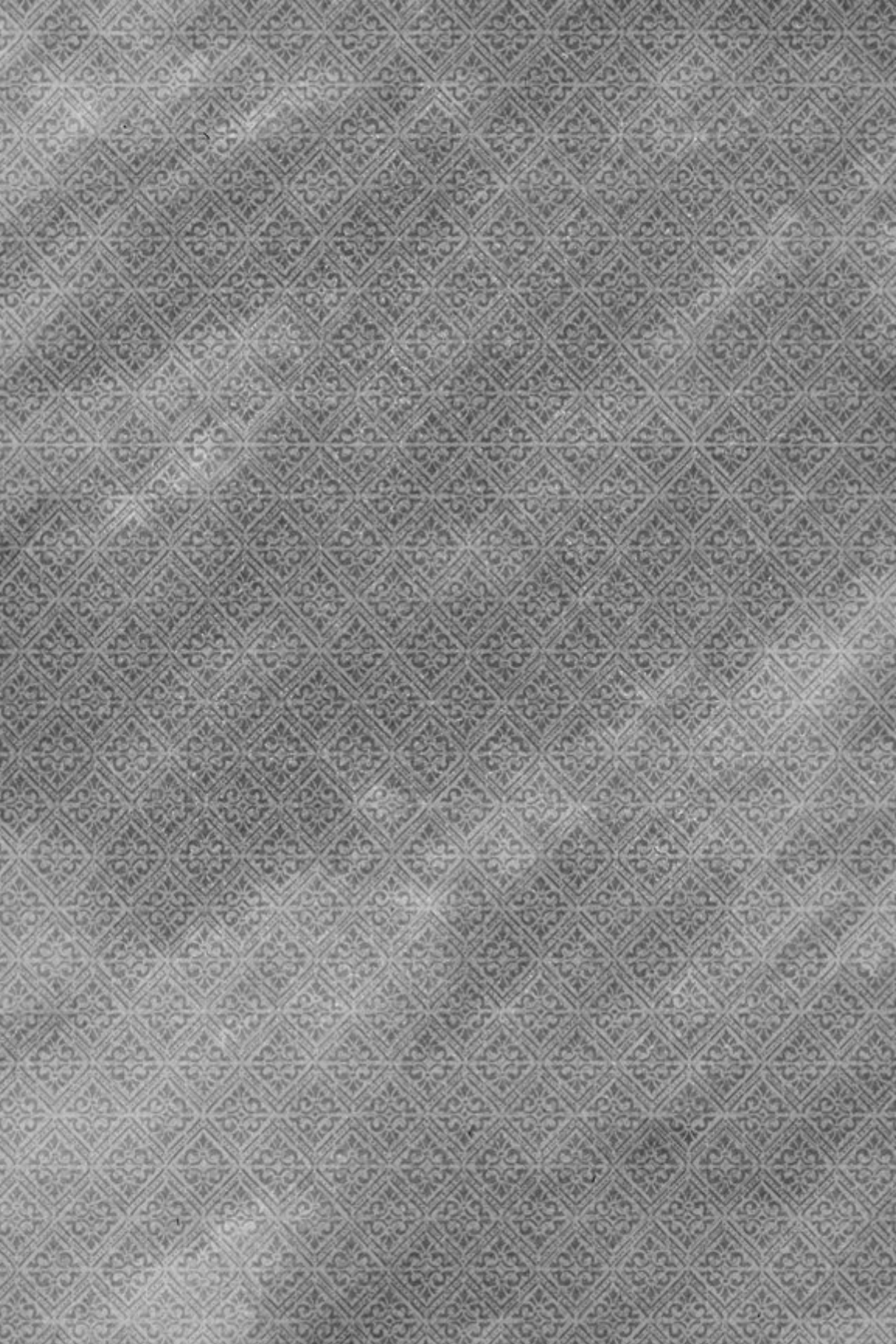
### *Pen and Paper*

When we seek to focus our minds, hearts, and bodies, remembering we are in God's loving presence, God will speak love and grace and truth into our hearts. He will remind us who he is; he will remind us who we are in Christ. He will illuminate in our hearts and lives the things that do not reflect Christlikeness. He will begin to soften us toward others, friends and enemies alike. He will transform our desires to match his. He will heal us, guide us, and invite us into his restorative work in the world.

But this is a slow process. You can go days without feeling a particular revelation or change in the moment. For this reason, I highly recommend keeping a pen and paper nearby so you can write down and reflect on whatever insights and thoughts you have as you journey through this book. Often we don't notice the slight, slow shifts in our souls and ways of thinking except in retrospect. So write in your Bible, in this book, in your journal—whatever works best for you and allows you to return to your notes later and see how God has worked. Try to stay in touch with how you're feeling as you read and reflect and pray.

### **A BLESSING**

Now, as you begin, may you know the presence of the Holy Spirit in your every breath, the lavish love your heavenly Father has for you as you are, and the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one for whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together.





# Invited

*Responding to Jesus' Invitations*

**IN ONE OF** my most vivid memories, I stand with my younger sister in front of the fish tank in our room and say, “We’re on our own now. We have to take care of ourselves.” I was ten. My mom had just gotten remarried, and we had moved from a house in southwest Michigan to a high-rise across the lake. We were separated from our dad and stepmom and ushered into a new life. My stepdad was a quadriplegic, and it became clear to me that our lives, and particularly my mom’s life, now centered around him.

The funny thing about this memory is that I’m not certain it actually happened. I do have a younger sister, and we did have a fish tank. But I don’t know if I said those words. I only know that I had a deep sense early in my life of being on my own.

My sense of aloneness only increased as I grew up. I became convinced that life was an individual sport, like golf. I would have to fight my way to importance and value. I couldn’t rely on other people; I had to carve my own path.

I learned what it meant to be responsible, independent, and self-sufficient. Those aren’t bad qualities in and of themselves, but for whatever reason, I didn’t simultaneously feel the counterbalance of childhood whimsy, the ability to depend on others, or the sense that if I reached out, someone would be there. Over time I learned how to stay safe and keep secrets, to not let anything about my inner world—my desires, struggles, doubts, loneliness, worries—show. This way of living led me to isolation—a refusal to allow other people into my experiences, my thoughts, or my heart. Ultimately, it made me struggle to receive love.

The fortress around my heart grew impassable. But in the midst of the most destructive, desperate years of my life, I became aware of a kind of beckoning deep in my soul. Slowly my ears began to open, and eventually I received the invitation of Jesus: “Come to me. Come to me. Come to me and I will give you rest.” In response, I gave him my life. And as the psalmist said, “He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God” (Psalm 40:2-3, NIV). The fortress walls came crumbling down and love flooded in.

Jesus’ invitations have continued since I received and responded to that first

one. He invites each of us in personal and profound ways throughout our lives. So it only makes sense that we begin this transformational journey through the Bible by immersing ourselves in his life-changing, life-giving invitations. Over the next fifteen days, we will begin to understand how to respond to Jesus' invitations with our minds, hearts, and bodies.

DAY 1

## COME TO ME

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

### READ MATTHEW 11:25-30

At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!

"My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those

to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

### REFLECT

In this passage, we read Jesus' most fundamental invitation. "Come to me," he says, and we cannot help but exhale. We are weary of our own struggles, the brokenness of the world, the painful relationships in our lives. We are burdened by our drive to achieve, by unmet expectations, by the wounds we carry with us. The sins of our pasts and the pain we have caused haunt us, and we long to be free. Aware of what pulls at our hearts, Jesus invites us not to believe doctrines or abide by rules but to find in him the rest we have been longing for.

- As you read today's passage, what words of Jesus stood out to you the most? Why do you think those particular words caught your attention?
- Read the passage again slowly. Which of your burdens or struggles come to mind? Where are you longing for rest? What invitation do you sense Jesus extending to you through this passage with respect to that particular longing?
- Do you know someone who seems burdened or weary? Seek God's guidance as to how you might share Jesus' invitation with that person or be a channel of the rest he offers.

## RESPOND

---

Loving God, thank you for this invitation that my soul longs for so deeply. Give me the courage and faith to say yes and move toward Jesus. Help me see what weighs on my heart and causes me to live in the ways of hurry and worry instead of peace and freedom. Teach me to walk with you and to show others, by the way I live, what it means to be yours. Amen.

DAY 2

## COME AND SEE

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ JOHN 1:35-39

---

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them. They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come and see,” he said.

## REFLECT

---

“Come and see.” Jesus offered this invitation in response to the question “Where are you staying?” But he seemed to have much more in mind than simply showing his disciples his lodging. As we continue reading, we understand what he was really saying: “If you want to know who I am, just follow along. See what I do, how I respond to others, how I love.” Jesus didn’t demand blind allegiance. He didn’t ensure that those he encountered had the right beliefs or behaviors first. He invited them to walk with him and watch his interactions. He invited them to draw their own conclusions. And this invitation sparked such curiosity and expectancy that fishermen dropped their nets, and tax collectors gave up their profits to follow.

- What do you think Jesus was seeking to communicate to each person he approached?
- Read today’s passage again slowly. What invitation do you sense Jesus extending to you through this passage? What does he want you to come and see about him right now?
- Do you know someone who doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus? Seek God’s guidance and wisdom as to how you might be able to extend an invitation to “come and see” so that person can learn more about Jesus.



## RESPOND

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Loving God, thank you for the simple invitation to come and see, to experience your goodness and love. Give me eyes to see where I've gotten off track or forgotten what's true about Jesus and the life and love he offers. Call me again and again to come and see. Grant me the courage and words to extend this invitation to the people in my life who are longing for more and only need someone to pique their curiosity and invite them. Amen.

DAY 3

## FOLLOW ME

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ LUKE 9:57-62

---

As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."

But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."

He said to another person, "Come, follow me."

The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father."

But Jesus told him, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God."

Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family."

But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."

## REFLECT

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Our world offers many leaders, causes, and trends to follow. But Jesus says, "Follow me."<sup>1</sup> This seems an easier invitation for those who lived when he walked the earth—they could, quite literally, follow Jesus and watch how he loved, healed, forgave, and shared about the Kingdom of God. Yet even with Jesus physically present and calling to them, many still could not say yes. Responding to Jesus' invitation to follow will always mean saying no to other responsibilities and desires. We will want to say, "I will follow you, but first let me . . ." Jesus asks us to say, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you," and trust that our competing obligations and wants will find their proper place.

- What emotions and reactions stir in you as you read Jesus' response to each person in today's passage?
- Consider the primary places in which your day-to-day life happens—your home, workplace, church, or neighborhood. What does it mean to follow Jesus in each of those places? What kinds of relationships, obligations, and desires tend to distract you from Jesus' call to follow him?
- Read today's passage again slowly. What invitation do you sense Jesus extending to you through this passage?

## RESPOND

---

Loving God, thank you for Jesus' invitation to follow. As best I know how, I say yes. My heart wants to follow, but give me the faith, the courage, and the strength to trust that as I do, you will help me love the people you've placed in my life well, do the work you've given me with faithfulness, and serve with compassion those you've called me to serve. When distractions come and obligations threaten to pull me away from you, call me back and remind me to follow. Amen.

DAY 4

## BELIEVE

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ MATTHEW 9:18-31

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The leader of a synagogue came and knelt before [Jesus]. "My daughter has just died," he said, "but you can bring her back to life again if you just come and lay your hand on her."

So Jesus and his disciples got up and went with him. Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe, for she thought, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed."

Jesus turned around, and when he saw her he said, "Daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was healed. . . .

When Jesus arrived at the official's home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music. "Get out!" he told them. "The girl isn't dead; she's only

asleep." But the crowd laughed at him. . . . Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up! The report of this miracle swept through the entire countryside.

After Jesus left the girl's home, two blind men followed along behind him, shouting, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" . . .

Jesus asked them, "Do you believe I can make you see?"

"Yes, Lord," they told him, "we do."

Then he touched their eyes and said, "Because of your faith, it will happen." Then their eyes were opened, and they could see! Jesus sternly warned them, "Don't tell anyone about this." But instead, they went out and spread his fame all over the region.

## REFLECT

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In today's passage, we see Jesus perform three stunning miracles: healing a chronically sick woman, raising a dead girl to life, and restoring the sight of two blind men. But Matthew reports these miracles so matter-of-factly and quickly that we are apt to miss their significance. Through miracles, Jesus implicitly invited people to believe that he was the one God had promised to send to his people—the Messiah and King who would save and restore. And if Jesus was the Messiah-King, then God had kept his promises, and God's Kingdom had arrived. Jesus is still inviting us to believe he is the one who saves, heals, and restores.

- Imagine being present to witness one of the miracles we read about in today's passage. What do you see around you? What words and noises do you hear? What do you feel as Jesus acts to bring restoration? What does Jesus want you to believe about him in that moment?

- Read today's passage again slowly. What invitation do you sense Jesus extending to you? What is he asking you to believe?
- Do you have friends or family members who say they are Christians but seem unsure or unclear about who Jesus is? Seek God's guidance as to how you might be able to extend them an invitation to believe.

## RESPOND

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Loving God, thank you for this invitation from Jesus to believe that he is the fulfillment of your promises to bring healing and restoration and that he is the one who saves and brings life. Grant me experiences that will deepen and expand my faith and allow me to surrender to you more fully. Bring to my mind or allow my path to cross with someone who is stuck in his or her faith, and use me to strengthen that individual's belief in Jesus. Amen.

DAY 5

## BE BORN AGAIN

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart. Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ JOHN 3:1-15

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There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as

you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

## REFLECT

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Nicodemus, a leader among the Jewish religious authorities, came to Jesus at night, obviously not wanting to be seen for fear of what his friends and fellow teachers might think. But something about Jesus caused Nicodemus to ask questions, and to Nicodemus's surprise, he learned that Jesus was not asking anyone to add another religious task to their daily routine as a way to earn God's favor; rather,

Jesus was inviting people to receive a new life altogether—one that would allow access to the Kingdom of God.

- What does your new life in Jesus look like? How has it been different from the old? What parts of the old life are you still holding on to?
- Read today's passage again slowly. What invitation related to new life do you sense Jesus extending to you?
- Do you know a "Nicodemus"—someone who seems to have it all together but is longing for something more, something deeper? Seek God's guidance as to how you might be able to invite that person to receive new life in Christ.

#### RESPOND

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Loving God, thank you for this invitation to be born again and receive new life. You placed in me a desire for more than money, power, success, and stuff. You created me with a longing to know you and to be a part of your Kingdom, where love, mercy, and peace reign. Help me continue to embrace the new life you've given me. And give me eyes to see those who are longing for more so I can extend your invitation. Amen.

DAY 6

## BE SEEN

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

#### READ JOHN 20:11-29

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Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy! . . . Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas . . . , was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." . . .

Later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among

them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

## REFLECT

Jesus' words in today's passage are so personal and intimate, spoken to meet the exact need he saw in each person. To Mary, who somehow didn't recognize him in her despair, he spoke her name, gently making his presence known with a single word. To the disciples fearing for their lives, Jesus spoke peace and gave them the Holy Spirit by his very breath. Jesus called the disbelieving Thomas close and extended his wounds for Thomas to feel.

- When you first decided to believe in Jesus, what need was he meeting in you (for example, your need for grace, purpose, belonging)?
- Read today's passage again slowly. What invitation about being seen do you sense Jesus extending to you?
- Who do you know who thinks they are too needy or have too many doubts to be loved by Jesus right now? Seek God's guidance as to how you might be able to invite them to be met by Christ in the midst of their need.

## RESPOND

Loving God, thank you for the invitation to be seen, truly seen, in all my need. Thank you that you speak words right into the insecurity and burdens I carry. I bring my needs to you now and pray that you would whisper words that only you know will bring comfort. Help me to be someone who sees others with your eyes and offers words of grace, healing, and hope. Amen.

DAY 7

# BE KNOWN AND ACCEPTED

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ JOHN 4:1-30

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John. . . . So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. . . .

Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of

Sychar. . . . Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink."

He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water?" . . .

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is

the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus told her, "I AM the Messiah!"

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

## REFLECT

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This passage is multilayered and touches on many different theological issues, but as we focus on Jesus' invitations, it's hard not to notice his unique one to the Samaritan woman: to be truly known. What stunned this woman—and caused her to share her experience with her entire town—was not that a Jewish man offered her living water to end her thirst or that he claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah. What astounded her was that he knew it all—every darkness of her heart and every thought that had crossed her mind—and yet loved her and invited her to drink.

- Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days, and many came to believe in him as the Savior (see John 4:40-41). Based on what we have read so far about Jesus, what do you imagine he said to the Samaritans that caused them to believe? What might his invitation to them have been?
- Read today's passage again slowly. What invitation related to being fully known and accepted do you sense Jesus extending to you?
- Who do you know who seems ashamed of current or past experiences and might think they could never be loved if really known? Seek God's guidance as to how you might be able to extend to that person an invitation to be fully known and accepted by Christ.

## RESPOND

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Loving God, thank you for the invitation to be fully known and accepted. At times, I have a nagging sense that if I were truly known—all the things I've done and thought and said, all my fears and failures—no one could accept me. But you already know and see all that is inside me—my mind, heart, and soul—and yet you call to me still, inviting me to receive your love and promising to renew my mind, transform my heart, and restore my soul. Thank you. Amen.

DAY 8

## BE HEALED

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ JOHN 5:2-15

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Inside [Jerusalem], near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?”

“I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up.” . . .

Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!”

Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle

happened on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!”

But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

“Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded.

The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

## REFLECT

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Imagine lying by a pool for years, waiting to be healed but feeling edged out each time. Now imagine that a man arrives, speaks a few words—and suddenly you can walk for the first time in thirty-eight years. What’s fascinating is that Jesus suggests the man’s sin was the cause of his illness and the man had a role to play in staying healthy after being healed. In other words, Jesus issued a two-part invitation: receive healing *and* turn away from sin. We shouldn’t interpret this to mean that every physical ailment is a result of sin (Jesus debunked that theory in John 9:1-3); however, Jesus *is* inviting us to receive the healing he offers and turn from destructive behaviors and attitudes.

- Why do you think Jesus asked the man whether he wanted to get well?
- Read today’s passage again slowly. What invitation related to receiving

healing do you sense Jesus extending to you? What is Jesus inviting you to turn away from?

- Who in your life is addicted to something destructive (a substance, a behavior, a relationship)? Seek God's guidance as to how you might be able to invite that person to receive the healing Jesus offers.

## RESPOND

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Loving God, thank you for the invitation to be healed. Please continue to heal my hurts and bind up my wounds. Show me my part to play to remain healthy, inside and out, and to be transformed by your love. And help me remember that others are hurting too. May I be gentle in my interactions so your healing may be known in me and through me. Amen.

DAY 9

## BE FREE

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ JOHN 8:3-11

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The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought [to Jesus] a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

"Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and

said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one . . . until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

## REFLECT

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Jesus' interaction with this woman provides an example of what he brought into the world: grace and truth. Jesus extended grace to the woman, but he also called her to live in truth by leaving her life of sin. He wanted her to be free, no longer enslaved to sin. Jesus extends this invitation today, calling us to receive his grace and forgiveness. He doesn't stop there, though; he also invites us to turn from sin and be free.

- What sins in your past do you condemn yourself for even though Christ does not condemn you? When you put your faith in Christ, those sins were fully



forgiven. Imagine Jesus sitting next to you and speaking these words to you: “I do not condemn you. I have forgiven you. You are free.” Ask God to help you receive Jesus’ words.

- Read this passage again slowly. What invitation related to turning away from sin do you sense Jesus extending to you?
- Who in your life do you find yourself quietly criticizing or condemning? Seek God’s guidance about how you might be able to extend Jesus’ love and grace to that person.

#### RESPOND \_\_\_\_\_

Loving God, thank you for your grace and the invitation to be free. Thank you for calling me to live in truth. Illuminate the ways I subtly criticize my family, my friends, my coworkers, and even strangers while ignoring the darkness and sin inside me. Give me eyes to see those who desperately need your grace and the reminder that you love them. Use me to be your ambassador of grace and freedom. Amen.

DAY 10

## RECEIVE LIFE TO THE FULL

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

#### READ JOHN 10:7-18 \_\_\_\_\_

[Jesus said,] “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because

he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

“The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”

#### REFLECT \_\_\_\_\_

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (verse 10, NIV).  
Something deep within us says yes when we hear this. Yes, we want this life to the

full. Yes, we long for more than the mundane and routine. We want to love well, get messy, and be free. What stops us? What holds us back?

When we fill our lives with busyness and refuse to quiet ourselves in God's presence, we close our ears to his voice, we forget we are his, and we lose our way. But Jesus says that the only way to have life to the full is to remain close to him, so close that we can hear and know his voice.

- Reflect on the times you have felt most alive. How would you describe those times to a friend? How would you describe your life now? Is there a gap between "life to the full" and what you're currently experiencing? How would you describe that gap?
- Read today's passage again slowly. What invitation related to experiencing life to the full do you sense Jesus extending to you?
- Do you know someone who seems to think their life is empty or without meaning? Seek God's guidance as to how you might invite that person to experience life to the full in Christ.

#### RESPOND \_\_\_\_\_

Loving God, thank you for the invitation to experience life to the full. I say yes. Help me receive this life you offer. Show me how to stay close, so close that I can hear your voice. Give me the courage to slow my mind and quiet myself in your presence. When I stray, call me back to you and help me remember I am yours. Remind me that life to the full has love at the center. May my life reflect your love. Amen.

DAY 11

## RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

#### READ JOHN 6:35-51 \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But you haven't believed in me even though you have seen me. However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is my Father's will that all who see

his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day. . . .

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them . . . and at the last day I will raise them up. As it is written in the Scriptures, 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. (Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from God, have seen him.)

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors

ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”

## REFLECT

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“Anyone who eats this bread will live forever.” Just as Jesus offers life here and now—to the full—he also offers life forever. Though we die, we will be raised up and given new bodies and new life in God’s presence for eternity. But this life is extended to us only in Jesus—and in the sacrifice of his very body. No other person or experience sustains, overcomes, and resurrects. All else that we might be tempted to trust in fades and disappoints.

- What fears do you have about death or what happens after death? When do those anxious thoughts or feelings most often arise in you?
- Read this passage again slowly. What invitation related to receiving eternal life do you sense Jesus extending to you?
- Do you know someone who lives with fear about death? Seek God’s guidance as to how you might invite them to receive the eternal life Christ offers.

## RESPOND

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Loving God, thank you for the invitation into eternal life. Thank you that in Jesus, I don’t need to fear death or condemnation but can look forward with hope and anticipation to the day I will be raised to life and live in your Kingdom forever. Guide me through times of fear and doubt, comforting me with what is to come. Allow the hope I have in you to seep out in my words, actions, and countenance so that others can see you in me. Amen.

DAY 12

## BRING ME WHAT YOU HAVE

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

### READ MATTHEW 14:13-21

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[Jesus] left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

That evening the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages

and buy food for themselves.”

But Jesus said, “That isn’t necessary—you feed them.”

“But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!” they answered.

“Bring them here,” he said. Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed

them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and

afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

## REFLECT

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We tend to spend our thoughts and energy seeking after more—more money, more prestige, more responsibility, more love, more education. Of course, these “mores” are not necessarily unhealthy or destructive. But rarely do we ask, *What might God do with what I have right now?* Some of this stems from feeling inadequate, especially when we compare ourselves to others. Or perhaps we are unwilling to open our hands to give God what we see as ours. Maybe we lack imagination and belief about what he can and desires to do: multiply what we have to display his goodness, bless those around us, and increase our faith. Jesus did not fault his disciples and the crowd for having little. Instead, he said, “Bring me what you have, and I will show you that in my hands, your little is extravagant surplus.”

- What would you offer in response to Jesus’ invitation to bring him what you have? What qualities, strengths, weaknesses, skills, doubts, and possessions are yours to offer? Which things are you holding back, or what feels too insignificant or unformed for you to bring forward?
- Read this passage again slowly. What invitation related to offering whatever you have do you sense Jesus extending to you?
- Do you know someone who—whether because they feel inadequate, struggle with confidence, or even lack imagination—needs encouragement to bring whatever they have to Jesus for his use? Seek God’s guidance as to how you might invite that person to bring forward what can be multiplied in Jesus’ hands.

## RESPOND

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Loving God, thank you for the invitation to bring all I am and have to you. Give me the strength to turn away from the temptation to constantly seek after more and instead take stock of all you have given me. And as best I know how, I offer it to you. Use me and what I have to display your goodness, bless those around me, and increase my trust in you. Open my eyes to the gifts of others so I can remind them that whatever they have can be multiplied in your hands. Amen.

# LOVE AS I HAVE LOVED

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ JOHN 13:12-35

After washing their feet, he . . . asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.” . . .

Jesus said, “The time has come for the Son of

Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him. And since God receives glory because of the Son, he will give his own glory to the Son, and he will do so at once. Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer. And as I told the Jewish leaders, you will search for me, but you can’t come where I am going. So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

## REFLECT

Jesus did what no other rabbi of his day would have done. In fact, the task of washing feet was reserved for non-Jewish servants. Jesus’ act had theological significance: It symbolized the washing of sin that Jesus would accomplish through his death. But he was also setting an example of how his disciples should love and serve one another. Everyone would know who they followed by the love they showed. This is still true today.

- Look back on the past week. How well did you love the people around you? Where did you sense stinginess or a lack of generosity in your response to others?
- Read this passage again slowly. What invitation related to loving and serving as Jesus did do you sense he is extending to you?
- Do you know someone who is in a season of difficulty or pain? Seek God’s guidance as to how you might love that person through words and actions.

## RESPOND

Loving God, thank you for the invitation to love and serve. I want the way I love my family, my friends, my coworkers, my neighbors, and even strangers to show that I am a follower of Jesus. Bring to my attention the areas in which I am stingy with love or lacking in generosity, and grow in me a desire to serve as a way to demonstrate your love and draw people to you. Amen.

## REMAIN IN ME

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

## READ JOHN 15:1-27

I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide

in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other.

If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? "A slave is not greater than the master." Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin. Anyone who hates me also hates my Father. If I hadn't done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: "They hated me without cause."

But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.

## REFLECT

Jesus used the image of a vine and its branches to help his disciples better understand his relationship to the Father, his disciples' relationship to him, and their relationship to the world. Jesus continues to invite us to stay connected to him as a branch stays connected to the vine, taking all its nutrients and strength from the vine. In doing so, we are empowered to bear fruit—to love as Jesus calls us to. If we separate ourselves from Jesus, we end up incapable of loving others and keeping his commands.

- Have there been times when you have felt disconnected from God? What caused that disconnection?

- Read this passage again slowly. What invitation related to staying connected to Jesus do you sense he is extending to you?
- Do you know someone who is feeling disconnected from God? Seek God's guidance as to how you might be able to invite that person back into a connection with Christ.

**RESPOND** \_\_\_\_\_

Loving God, thank you for the invitation to stay connected to Jesus as the source of my love and strength. There are times I get caught up in the busyness of life and the calls of this culture and drift off, away from the vine. Help me keep my eyes fixed on you and the things you care about so I can glorify you by the fruit I bear. May people come to know your love by looking at my life. Amen.

DAY 15

**GO INTO THE WORLD!**

*a prayer to open*

Here I am, Lord. Quiet my mind. Open my heart.  
Give me ears to hear your invitation and the faith to respond.

**READ JOHN 20:19-23** \_\_\_\_\_

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they

saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

**REFLECT** \_\_\_\_\_

One of the greatest temptations in our world today is to consider our relationships with Jesus private—to believe that we have been invited for only our sake. We may be inclined to focus on the fact that we are saved and destined for heaven and can therefore live out the rest of our days without fear. Although these things *are* true, they are not the whole story. As we have seen by studying Jesus' many invitations, he invites us so we can go into the world and invite others. When Jesus rose from the dead, he visited his disciples and extended one final invitation to them—an invitation to extend his invitation of life to the rest of the world (Matthew 28:19). Not only that, but Jesus spoke his peace over them and breathed his Spirit on them so they could extend the invitation without fear, in his power, and with his love.

- What are the biggest barriers or distractions that keep you from extending Jesus' invitation to life? What are the practices or environments that make it more likely for you to do so?
- Read this passage again slowly. What invitation related to carrying Jesus' invitation to life into the world do you sense him extending to you?
- Reflect on the places that you frequent. Seek God's guidance as to how, in those environments, you might extend Jesus' invitation to life.

**RESPOND**

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Loving God, thank you for the invitation to go into the world and extend the invitation of life in Christ. Please help me know how and where to do that. I need your Spirit to fill me with courage and peace and love. I need eyes that see the world as you do: full of redemptive potential, longing to know you more, and desperate for wholeness. Let my life be an invitation, an example of the life you offer. Amen.