

**FRESH
START**

21 DAYS READING PLAN

Most of the time, we start a new year with an idea of starting over or resetting our lives. Whether changing our diets, our habits or maybe an outlook on life. The problem with starting over or resetting ourselves or trying to change, we typically find our way back to the old self again. Many start a new year with a resolution but typically stop trying after the first 14 days.

When we reset ourselves or “start over” our minds go back to what we know, to a place and time in our lives that we either have experienced or fantasized about going in order to change our behavior. But could it be, when we “start over” we actually set ourselves up to fail into the same traps in the same timeline that brought you to the place that led you to want to start over? What we really need is a **Fresh Start**.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12 that in order to truly experience transformation in our life, then we ought to not follow the patterns of this world. We must not have the same attitudes, narratives, habits, desires as those how are without Christ, but rather be transformed by Christ Himself.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. **Romans 12:1-2***

He says the way we experience this transformation is by renewing our minds. This is not a one-time decision, but rather this something that constantly happens. Paul is challenging the church in Rome to live in a different way, a way that is selfless, not consumed with self, which is why he challenges them to *offer their bodies as living sacrifices*. One cannot do that and be selfish at the same time.

God has a unique way of taking broken things and turning them into brand new, giving that thing a fresh start.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! **2 Corinthians 5:17***

We invite you into to participate in this 21 Day journey. This reading guide was written to guide you through the book of John in 21 days. Read one chapter each day and spend time with God using the devotionals and questions provided.

Additional Study Resources

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/john>

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/john/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-bible-john/>

****Devotional courtesy of NewSpring Church | www.newspring.cc****

Day 1

Read

- John 1

John starts his account of Jesus's life with His birth. Here we would expect to see a star, a manger, cattle lowing, angels singing, wise men and the like. But in the sweeping introduction to his account, John doesn't tell of Jesus's beginning, but ours.

Jesus is the initiator of everything: the universe, our lives, our salvation—all were created and conceived by Jesus. As if that wasn't enough, in the most surprising move of all, John says Jesus entered into His creation, becoming a living, breathing human—walking among us. Don't miss this: Jesus became flesh and moved into the neighborhood He created. He played ball down the street with some- one's kids. He went to school and got hungry. He scratched up His knees and cried for His mother. He grew up and got a job. He had a real-life, human experience.

Why would He do such a thing? John sets out to answer this question for us. At a wedding, in a late-night debate, beside the drinking fountain, at the local hospital, with a disparaged woman, at the funeral of a friend and in other situations—John shows us who God is. All along, Jesus risks us misunderstanding Him in order that He might initiate a relationship with us. He doesn't initiate a relationship with us because we are worth it—He initiates a relationship with us to give us a life worth living. In light of all that He has done, how should we live in response?

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Why is it important that Jesus lived as a man among us?
- 3) What next step has God asked you to take? What keeps you from stepping forward?

Journal

Day 2

Read

- John 2

Have you ever felt like you were waiting on God? You feel as though you have been patient forever and just don't know when God will come through. Maybe God is waiting on you.

John 2 describes a wedding fiasco at Cana. Jesus and his disciples were attending a wedding when Jesus's mother, Mary, realized the couple had run out of wine for their guests. Wine was an important part of weddings in this culture. Not having wine was a big deal. When Mary saw Jesus, she walked up to Him and told Him about the problem. Jesus had the power to wave a hand and flood the wedding with wine, but did He? No. Instead, Jesus gave the servants an opportunity to be part of a miracle.

“Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water,’ so they filled them to the brim. Then He told them, ‘Now draw some (water) out and take it to the master of the banquet.’ They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine” (John 2:7-9a).

Because of the faithful obedience of the servants, an entire group of people were blessed with a miracle. Imagine if the servants hadn't had the faith to take a step of obedience. Jesus doesn't want to perform miracles in your life—He wants you to be a part of them.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What next step of obedience do you feel God is calling you to take?
- 3) Are you giving your best? What would it look like for you to fill your “water jars” to the brim?

Journal

Day 3

Read

- John 3

Whether or not we want to admit it, we have all been afraid of the dark. But what makes darkness so scary?

For one thing, it confuses us. When we can't see anyone or anything, we feel isolated and alone. Walking proves difficult because we can't see the path. Although we're usually safe, our imaginations run wild with the dangerous possibilities that could surround us.

We all lived in darkness at one point. Unable to see and believe in God, we lived with a constant sense of loneliness. Uncertain of where to walk, we did things we would probably rather not admit.

As unpleasant as it is, we often prefer to stay in the darkness rather than enter the light. We think darkness helps hide the mistakes we don't want anybody to see. We think if people knew the truth about us, they would judge us. But Jesus tells us it is safe to confess our sins. He promises that He did not come to condemn us for our sins, but to save us from them.

Because Jesus took our punishment, we receive complete forgiveness when we expose our sin to the light. In fact, God can use our mistakes for good if we are willing to confess them. When people see God doing great things through imperfect people, He looks even greater.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What do you need to confess and trust God to forgive today?
- 3) When people confess their sins to you, how do you respond? Are you forgiving or do you tend to judge people? What about your response needs to change as a result of grace Jesus has extended to you?

Journal

Day 4

Read

- John 4

Jesus isn't concerned about hanging with the "in" crowd. In John 4, Jesus initiates a conversation with a highly unlikely character—a Samaritan woman who had five husbands. Her gender made her culturally inferior. Her race labeled her as one to be avoided. Her lifestyle choices marked her as one to be condemned. But Jesus ignored all the social barriers meant to separate because His concern isn't for appearances; His concern is for people. All people. Hurting people. Searching people. People who make bad choices. Empty people. Because that's all of us, right?

In John 4:15, the woman refers to the hassle of returning to the well so often to quench her thirst. In the same way, she has repeatedly returned to the "well" of failed relationships to fill her emptiness, to quench her persistent disappointment. In John 4:13-14, Jesus offered to heal a hurt the woman didn't even realize she had. Today He offers the same for us.

While we stuff ourselves on what the world offers—money, success, relationships, sex, possessions, entertainment—the satisfaction

is momentary at best. Jesus offers us peace and joy and love and a relationship that is fulfilling. Jesus alone satisfies our every need, quenches our every thirst, lasts forever and never disappoints. He approaches us in our current state and offers to meet our greatest need—the need for a Savior.

1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?

2) How have you tried to fill your own emptiness with the things of the world? Just like the woman found herself returning to the well to try and fill her thirst, what sins do you find yourself returning to in an effort to fill the void in your heart?

3) How have you experienced Jesus's peace or joy or love in your own life recently?

Journal

Day 5

Read

- John 5

For most of John 5, Jesus speaks to the Jews who criticize Him for healing the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. The Jews had rules upon rules upon rules about what good Jewish people could and could not do. One of those rules prohibited any kind of work on the Sabbath. Healing was work, and according to their rules, should be saved for the other six days of the week. Allow the insanity of that to sink in. The religious Jews were essentially saying, “How dare you perform a miraculous healing in defiance of the Jewish law! How dare you change this man’s life on the Sabbath! How dare you end his 38 years of suffering! That can surely wait until tomorrow.”

Jesus continues to call them out in John 5:39–40, where He points out their diligent study of the Scriptures but their blatant disregard for believing them. The whole Bible is about Jesus. Even the Old Testament tells us about God’s plan to send His Son to save us. The Jews knew those Scriptures well but failed to recognize Jesus as their fulfillment.

If we aren’t careful, we too can turn our relationship with Jesus into a bunch of rules to follow, a bunch of words we read, and a bunch of songs we sing. By doing so, we can completely miss Jesus and the miracles He is doing all around us.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) How has Jesus performed healing in your life?
- 3) Why is it our tendency to make our relationship with Jesus a checklist of good behaviors? What changes can you make today to break that cycle?

Journal

Day 6

Read

- John 6

Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves of bread, walks on water across stormy seas in the middle of the night, and follows that up by declaring to a crowd of people that in order to live they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. To be honest, John 6 is a little scary. Not because Jesus talks about eating flesh and blood, but because it is hard to accept. Many in the crowd felt the same, “from this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.”

Walking on water and making bread join a long list of miracles along with raising people from the dead and opening blind eyes. Jesus’s miracles and His controversial “eat my flesh” statement all convey the same message: Jesus is the point. In this life and the next, we can never be satisfied apart from Jesus. And on the opposite end of that spectrum, if we have nothing but Jesus, we have everything.

I understand why some walked away. They didn’t want to surrender everything to Jesus. Some people probably wanted a show, to be a part of something powerful, or to have a need met. Their world was similar to our world today, looking for more money, more things, more options and more religion. More was the focus of their desires, actions and attitudes.

Jesus speaks in direct contrast, saying “I am” the answer. Jesus did not come to leave us wanting; He came to give us everything. He is everything. Like Peter, we can say with joy, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What, if anything, are you scared to surrender to Jesus? Is anything in your life holding you back from a 100 percent commitment to Him?
- 3) Do you think you are living a full life? Why or why not? Ask God if He wants to change the way you live.

Journal

Day 7

Read

- John 7

Sometimes following God can lead you to lonely places. Jesus's own brothers questioned His divinity and seemed to mock Him, pushing Him to go public and show everyone who He really was. Jesus dealt with criticism from His brothers, criticism from neighbors and death threats from the religious leaders who should have been on His side.

The very people that should have supported and sustained Jesus's ministry turned against Him and yet, He continued to do the right thing. Jesus did not grow bitter or angry; He did not plot revenge or plan a public relations campaign to promote Himself. Instead, Jesus chose not to take His rightful place as God. He chose to humble Himself, stay out of the confusion and offer spiritual refreshment to anyone who was looking for something new (John 7:37).

We can take heart because if we've given our lives to the same Jesus that dealt with real life problems. When we feel lonely and left out, we know He felt the same way and responded in love. We can rest in the knowledge that Jesus suffered and faced hardship, but it never conquered Him. That means sorrow, loneliness and hardships do not have to conquer us.

No matter your circumstances, Jesus can understand exactly where you are and help you stand strong. Because Jesus faced loneliness, you do not have to face loneliness alone.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Do you have a troubled relationship with someone in your life? How can you respond to this person differently knowing you have the strength Jesus offers?
- 3) Are you putting off a decision because you are afraid of the outcome or worried about being ostracized? How can you proceed?

Journal

Day 8

Read

- John 8

Using the name God gave Himself in Exodus 3:14, Jesus makes an audacious claim: "Before Abraham was, I am." Jewish leaders heard this statement and lost their minds. They were so angry that they wanted Jesus dead. The Pharisees were considered the ultimate authority on God's Word by the nation of Israel and had an incredible knowledge of the scriptures. Jesus brushed off their personal attacks and reminded the Jewish leaders that they may know scripture, but they do not know God.

What a dangerous place to be! It is possible to know the Bible cover to cover and not know God. In John 8, the Jewish leaders knew enough Bible to debate Jesus but failed to apply it to their lives. Reading and applying the Bible should always point us to Jesus. Knowing scripture is not as important as not knowing Jesus.

When we know scripture and apply it, we look like Jesus at the beginning of chapter 8. We shield the helpless, forgive the sinful, offer hope in hopeless situations and rebuke self-righteousness. When scripture is applied, it points us to Jesus instead of preparing us for debate. As you read your Bible, don't miss the point.

- 1) What can you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) While reading your Bible today and over the next few weeks, begin your time by asking God to meet with you and allow you to know Him, not just His words.
- 3) Is there a verse or idea from today's reading you can apply to your life right now? How can learning about Jesus through the Bible change your actions and attitude?

Journal

Day 9

Read

- John 9

When Jesus heals someone, their life is never the same. Can you imagine living with absolutely no vision? Your view of the world is the images someone has patiently painted in your mind. John 9 describes a man blind since birth. Some of Jesus's disciples presumed the blindness had been brought on by sin, maybe his or maybe even the sin of his parents. Jesus assured them that the man's troubles had not been caused by sin, but "...so the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).

If you were blind, would you be willing to try just about anything to be radically healed? Can you see yourself thinking, "Cover my eyes with a fresh mud pie made out of spit? Good plan!" Because that's exactly what Jesus did. After covering the man's eyes with mud Jesus told him to go wash his face. In an instant, his dark world became light.

Religious leaders overlooked the healing miracle because they wanted to ensure it happened according to their regulations. Was this the same man who had been blind, the beggar? If so, who had healed him? Didn't Jesus know He wasn't supposed to heal people on the Sabbath? Their interrogation ended abruptly with the former blind man proclaiming, "I was blind, but now I see!" (John 9:25)

Everyone who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior has a before and after story. If you've gone from darkness to light, your story has been written so the works of God might be displayed in you. Your story is just as miraculous as the one in John 9. You were blind, and now you see.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Who do you need to share your story with today? Not sure where to start? Go to www.newspring.cc/mystory to practice sharing your story.
- 3) If you haven't given your life to Jesus, today is the perfect day to talk with someone about Him. Email matt@rhctopeka.org to talk with someone about Him.

Journal

Day 10

Read

- John 10

How can we live abundant lives? We all want that, don't we? But we can't answer how until we focus on the more important question: What—or who—is the source of an abundant life?

Jesus says in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." Chasing anything other than Jesus will steal what God has blessed you with, kill your dreams and destroy your purpose in life. Jesus, and only Jesus, restores the blessings that have been stolen, brings life to dreams that have died and gives our lives purpose. Possessions come and go, as does the enjoyment they bring. The only way to experience joy that never leaves is to have something that cannot fail. An abundant life comes from Jesus, who never fails.

If you were to ask anyone who has the biggest house, fastest car or largest bank account, they will tell you they find themselves striving for more. But if you ask anyone who has made Jesus Lord of their life, they will tell you that they are blessed beyond anything they could have ever asked or imagined. A life apart from Jesus will always leave you lacking, but a life centered on Jesus is full of abundance.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What do you strive for in life? How does what you strive for differ from what Jesus strived for?
- 3) What are some common traps that keep us from living the full life Jesus promised?

Journal

Day 11

Read

- John 11

Have you ever wondered about God's timing? You're not alone. Some of Jesus's close friends did too. When Lazarus became deathly ill, his sisters, Mary and Martha, asked Jesus for help. They knew Jesus was traveling and His ministry was exploding, but He was a close friend. Surely He could take a few minutes to heal their brother. But Jesus didn't show up. Two days later when He arrived, it was too late. Lazarus was dead.

Martha and Mary were not only grief stricken, but deeply troubled by Jesus's apparent lack of concern. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." (John 11:21-23) Jesus replied to her, "Your brother will rise again." Even hearing Jesus's words, the sisters were probably wondering, "Lord, what are You thinking now?!"

As they traveled to Lazarus's four-day-old gravesite, Martha questioned Jesus's timing again. His response to her was clear, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" After thanking God, Jesus called out loudly, "Lazarus, come out!" And he did. Lazarus, still wrapped in strips of linen, but fully alive, walked out of the tomb.

Maybe you've questioned Jesus's timing. You knew exactly when He needed to show up and what He needed to do, but it didn't work out the way you had planned. Even when we don't understand, He can be trusted.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Have you ever doubted God's timing? What did you learn from that situation?
- 3) If you're unsure about God's plan or timing in a situation now, would you surrender it to Him? How could trusting God's timing change your thoughts and attitude about your circumstance?

Journal

Day 12

Read

- John 12

What would you consider your most valuable possession? Maybe it's a car, a family heirloom, a computer or a house. We all have things that we value and take great care to keep.

In the beginning of John 12, we see the thing Mary considered precious—a bottle of expensive perfume. This perfume was not just a fragrance to Mary. It was worth nearly a year's wages. Mary wasn't just saving this perfume for a special day. This bottle was her financial security.

In an act of worship, Mary poured her perfume onto Jesus's feet. She knelt to the ground and washed His feet, indifferent to the opinions of others. Mary gave radically. She gave not knowing if she'd be able to live through the day but trusting Jesus anyway. She gave with such extravagance that the disciples told her she'd given too much.

To put Mary's situation in today's terms: the average American makes about \$50,000 a year. It would be like you going to church next Sunday, feeling called to give and writing a check for your entire year's salary. Absurd! Yet, this is the same way God gave to us. He gave His best, Jesus. God not only calls us to radical faith. He calls us to radical giving.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What's holding you back from pouring your security out at Jesus' feet? How does this chapter show us that we can trust Him with what's most precious to us?
- 3) Is there anything in your life you have not given to God?

Journal

Day 13

Read

- John 13

We've all had to wrestle with forgiveness. We can't escape hurt feelings or being wronged, and neither could Jesus. In John 13, Jesus models forgiveness in a way that doesn't allow us to hold grudges. He is sitting at the table with His disciples, fully aware that two of them, Judas and Peter, are about to betray Him.

Jesus' forgiveness extended beyond simply saying "I forgive you." Forgiveness is not just something He says; it's something He puts into action. Jesus kneels and selflessly serves them as He washes their feet, including Judas and Peter. He makes no exceptions. He offers His forgiveness to everyone, no matter what they have done or will do.

We can often read this chapter and be amazed these men sat at the table with Jesus and then turned their backs on Him. We can wonder how Jesus offers forgiveness to men like this, but falsely believe we cannot do the same to the people that have hurt us.

The game changer is when you and I realize we are the same as the men at the table with Jesus. We are the ones who deny Him, and He washes our feet. You and I were far from God, denying Him with our life and deserting Him in our choices, yet He still came for us. That kind of grace cannot stop with the one who benefits from it—we must extend grace, too.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Have you accepted Jesus' forgiveness in your own life? Are there things you can't believe Jesus would ever forgive you for?
- 3) To whom in your life do you need to extend forgiveness? How can you forgive him or her today?

Journal

Day 14

Read

- John 14

Obedience is not easy! At least that's the case when you're the one having to be obedient and not the one calling the shots. In John 14, Jesus is very clear about who is in charge—He is obedient to the Father.

We can find a concise definition of obedience in James 1:22: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." An important part of obedience is reading the Bible. However, reading words is just the first part of being obedient. The next, and more important part is putting those words into action. When we read about giving generously to the poor, we actually go do it. When we read about forgiving our neighbor, we actually forgive them. This is true obedience.

In John 14:15–23, Jesus tells us why obedience is such a big deal. He connects our obedience to our love for Him. He declares that our love for Him will give us a desire to be obedient. As we learn more about Him and fall deeper in love with Him, we will want nothing more than to be just like Him. The love of God prompts our obedience, not the other way around.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What areas of your life don't look much like Jesus?
- 3) What is one thing can you do today to make your life look more like Jesus's life?

Journal

Day 15

Read

- John 15

Dead branches don't produce fruit. Dead branches don't require pruning, they are cut off completely. Pruning is not only for branches, but also for people who are alive and producing fruit, seeking Jesus, connecting to Him, following Him, growing and changing.

Love is a fruit. Patience, kindness, gentleness, joy, faithfulness, goodness and self-control are all fruits (Galatians 5:22-23). These characteristics are evident in people who are connected to Jesus, the vine. What others see is a reflection of what's going on inside of us. As a follower of Jesus, others should see fruit in your life. If you are not seeing fruit in your life, maybe it's time to connect with Jesus. Get connected to the source that will give you abundant life and produce that fruit in you.

If you are in a season of pruning, it is because you are connecting to Jesus. You are growing, you are changing, and He is making you into something more beautiful, something richer and better than what you already are. Jesus is not content letting you stay the way you are—He wants more for you. He wants the absolute best for your life! 1 Peter 5:7 says, "cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." He cares for you and although the process may be painful and uncomfortable, He is not okay with letting you stay where you are when He knows there is something more beautiful waiting. He will perfect you because He is concerned for you.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Is there evidence of fruit in your life?
- 3) What are some practical ways to stay connected and growing in a relationship with Jesus?

Journal

Day 16

Read

- John 16

In this world we will have trouble—that's a given. But there is hope! In John 16, Jesus explains to the disciples that while He would be leaving this earth, they would not be left alone. As believers, we have the Holy Spirit living in us. He is our comforter, our peace, our strength and our teacher. That was part of God's plan from the beginning. The Holy Spirit is ready and available to be part of anyone and everyone's life. God did not leave us to navigate life in this world on our own.

Depending on your background, you may find the thought of the Holy Spirit weird or even scary. But the Holy Spirit is a gift from God, and God only gives good gifts. The Holy Spirit's main role is to bring us comfort, encouragement and understanding.

God sent the Holy Spirit to lead us and comfort us. The Holy Spirit corrects us and lets us know when we need to address sin in our lives. He guides us, nudges us and leads us as we take next steps in faith. The Holy Spirit also reveals truth to us, truth that brings about change in our hearts, our minds and our character as we seek Him and obey Him. He brings us peace, comfort and strength. He is our companion.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Is there something the Holy Spirit is nudging you about? Do you have a next step to take or a sin that needs to be addressed?
- 3) Do you trust the Holy Spirit and know that He is always with you? Why or why not?

Journal

Day 17

Read

- John 17

If you want to know what someone thinks about God, listen to their prayers. Do they ask God only for wealth and possessions, or for others' salvation? Do they appeal for God's intervention like they would present a business proposal or as a child petitioning his or her father?

In John 17, we're allowed to eavesdrop on one of Jesus' prayers to God. Although it is only moments before He will be betrayed, beaten and crucified, Jesus takes time to pray on behalf of His disciples. He shows His heartfelt concern, not only for the men He has taught for years but for those who would later hear His message, including you.

The intimacy and familiarity with which Jesus speaks to God is evident. For eternity, even before "the foundation of the world," Jesus and God the Father have shared a perfect loving relationship. Through Christ, you have been enabled to enter into their perfect loving union.

You have received eternal life and restoration to a loving and intimate relationship with God through Jesus.

God is not far off and Jesus' concern for you is not distant. He prayed for you. Even today, the Son resides next to the Father, continuing to appeal on your behalf (1 John 2:1). Today, thank God for allowing you to enter into a completely loving relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) How are you encouraged by the fact that Jesus prayed for you?
- 3) How can your confidence in God's love for you affect your actions, even in the face of those who hate you (verse 14)?

Journal

Day 18

Read

- John 18

Some days alarms don't go off, cars won't start and nothing goes as planned. But even those mishaps pale in comparison to moments when someone suddenly loses their job, is widowed or struck with an incurable illness. Our future is unforeseen, sometimes in the worst ways.

The scene in John 18 is an unimaginable disaster. Jesus is betrayed by one of His closest friends. He is arrested and bound by a band of officers and soldiers. Then, He is interrogated and treated like a criminal. Seemingly, everything had gone wrong.

But in reality, everything was going according to plan. John makes it clear that Jesus was not a victim of circumstance, but contrary to appearances, He was in complete control. Jesus foretold these events. He turned himself over to them "knowing all that would happen to him" (John 18:4) and He declared to Pilate, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world" (John 18:37). How could Jesus continue to submit to the situation? He trusted in God's perfect plan.

In the same way Jesus trusted in the goodness of the Father despite His circumstances, we can trust that God is in complete control over every aspect of our lives. Even when events are outside of our control, we can rest assured that God is graciously orchestrating everything for ultimate good (Romans 8:28). Today, thank God for His goodness and His authority over all circumstances. Ask Him to help you remember this truth in the face of any difficulty.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) How can this view of God's control over all circumstances change how you consider difficulties in your own life?

Journal

Day 19

Read

- John 19

Right before Jesus took His last breath, He spoke the words, "It is finished." Jesus finished what we couldn't.

In His three years of ministry, Jesus completed the task set before Him. He voluntarily chose to sacrifice Himself, knowing His death would pay the penalty for our sin and create a way for us to become right with God and have a relationship with God. We were born sinful and separated from God. Accepting that Jesus is our Savior is the only way we are able to restore that relationship. Jesus finished what we could not.

Jesus finished so we could believe. John tells us in verse 35 that this testimony of Jesus was given, "so that you also may believe." The events of Jesus's death on the cross were recorded based on an eyewitness testimony. You and I were not there to see this with our own eyes, but someone did see these things and recorded them. God gave us someone tangible to believe in by sending His son, Jesus, here to earth. Jesus gave His life to make a way for us to have life (John 10:10).

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What area(s) in your life seem too overwhelming to finish? What strength can you find from Jesus?
- 3) Jesus said that Peter would deny Him, but later come back to follow Christ (Luke 22:31-34). Do you carry the fear that Jesus is surprised by your sin? What does it mean to you to know that Jesus loves you despite what you have done or will do?

Journal

Day 20

Read

- John 20

Our culture is obsessed with the idea that anybody can begin a new life. We watch reality television shows that make us believe we can all become an instant celebrity. We love the American dream because it tells us that we can be anything we want to if we try hard enough. But the reality is we have no hope of changing ourselves. The only way we can put away sinful habits is through a relationship with Jesus made possible by His death and resurrection.

On the cross, Jesus clothed Himself in our sin. When Peter and John looked into the empty tomb, they saw Jesus was not there and He had left His burial clothes. John 20 shows us that Jesus left our sinful nature in the grave when He rose from the dead.

We do not have to be controlled by our desire to sin. The hope of the resurrection is that we do not have to live our old lives anymore! Not only do we not have to be clothed in sin anymore, but the resurrection also means we get to be clothed in something better, too. In Colossians 3:12, Paul says, "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Following Jesus allows us to put away our old lives and begin new ones.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) What old habits do you need to do away with?
- 3) What are some things Jesus wants you to start doing?

Journal

Day 21

Read

- John 21

You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” This phrase may have haunted you before a job interview or first date. Sometimes our first impression of someone leads to false assumptions. Sometimes we even have a relationship with someone and struggle giving them a second chance when their sin disappoints us. The pressure is high in our society to make a great first impression. If we succeed, we tend to keep our guard up; if someone knew “that” about us, they wouldn’t want to be around us anymore.

Peter had betrayed Jesus after promising he never would. Even after seeing Jesus alive again, Peter heads back out to sea to return to what he was doing before Jesus had called him. He must have felt an overwhelming sense of shame and loss as he loaded the boat to fish that day. Useless to God, he had blown it. He might as well go back to his old job because God definitely couldn’t use a traitor like him to spread the great news that Jesus had died for our sins and was alive again.

Psalms 103:10 says, “He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.” The very thing Peter feared was proven a lie by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thank God He didn’t leave Peter alone. He forgave him and sent him on a mission to preach His word. What a beautiful description of love as Jesus returns to the circumstance where He first called Peter and gives him a second chance.

We are not useless to God when we mess up. In fact, when God forgives our sin and uses us despite it, our life is a witness to Jesus’s love and power.

- 1) What did you learn about Jesus from this chapter?
- 2) Have you committed a sin you feel has made you useless to God? Are you willing to risk people’s opinion of you to find help when you need it?
- 3) Are you a forgiving person toward others?

Journal