



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN



ENCOUNTERS

Transformational Moments With Jesus

12-WEEK DEVOTIONAL WITH PRAYER GUIDE

SUMMER 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 **A SICK WOMAN**
- 2 **BARTIMAEUS**
- 3 **A SINFUL WOMAN**
- 4 **DISCIPLES**
- 5 **ZACCHAEUS**
- 6 **THE ROAD TO EMMAUS**
- 7 **NATHANAEL**
- 8 **WOMAN AT THE WELL**
- 9 **THE FIVE THOUSAND**
- 10 **MARY MAGDALENE**
- 11 **THOMAS**
- 12 **PETER**

WRITTEN BY
CAPTAIN
JOYCE DOWNER

1

A Sick Woman

MARK 5:24B-34



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

A sick woman. At first glance, we can be offended by the telling of this story because, why does it have to be a woman without a name? Why can't the author name her? But what if there's more to it? "A sick woman" is a label given by society – how she is viewed – a woman with no name – with no identity other than acknowledging her ailment. A woman who, for many years, is defined not by who the Creator created her to be, but by this all-consuming illness that brings pain, suffering, and exclusion from community. A sickness that informs her every human interaction (or lack of interaction), an illness that consumes her every day – the way she journeys through life, the way she is perceived. The scripture says under the care of others, the woman doesn't get better, she only gets worse. We also read that:

**She had suffered a great deal.
She had spent all she had.**

The woman had exhausted her own resources. She was out of options.

There is so much that she didn't have. But, she had faith. She believed Jesus could heal her.

Society named her, 'the sick woman'. But that's not how Jesus sees her, that's not who she is to Him.

**Jesus calls her by her true name, "Daughter."
Jesus confirms that the woman is "healed."
Jesus speaks life over her when He declares she is "free from suffering!"**

So, when Jesus heals the woman, yes, we understand that encounter is an answer to a long-standing prayer for an end to long-suffering. But it is more than physical healing. This is an encounter with the Almighty God. Jesus is declaring both who He is, but also who the woman is in Him. A new name written down in glory!

**She is a daughter of the King.
She is loved.
She is free.
She goes in peace with the knowledge that external
circumstances and labels don't define her, the Lord does.**

Scripture tells us that the response to an encounter with Jesus was immediate. That as soon as she met Jesus in the crowds, the very moment she touched His cloak, her bleeding immediately stopped. The woman could feel in her body that she had been healed at the exact time Jesus felt the power leaving Him.

In this account, we want to jump to the immediate results of the physical encounter with Jesus. Yet, we know from this story that the woman waited a long time – 12 years, that’s more than 4,000 days.

The power of the woman’s story is of her faithful trust in the Lord; the evidence of who God is, in part, comes from acknowledging the length of her waiting. Her heart had been readied for, and was prepared for her encounter with Jesus. The woman was ready to receive healing, believing who Jesus said He was and who He said she was.

A loved woman. A person who is experiencing freedom. A child of God. A faithful follower of Jesus.

This moment with Jesus changes the trajectory her life. But let’s not forget the lead-up to her miraculous healing included a decade of suffering; physical, social isolation, financial ruin. Yet, she didn’t lose hope that one day, she could be well. She trusted in a faithful God even through her suffering.

We can have confidence, as this woman did, that an encounter with Jesus will alter the course of our lives. And we can also see from this woman’s experience that there is no certainty of the Lord’s timing, of the waiting, nor that suffering is avoidable if we follow Christ. We are invited to have faith in the goodness of God, regardless of our circumstances. We can have confidence – like this woman – that Jesus is faithful and trustworthy in it all, and that He sees us for who we created us to be, not by our situations or by how the world defines us.

PRAYER JOURNAL

Praise

What does
this
encounter
reveal about
Jesus?

**Give
Thanks**

Thank Jesus
for how He
has met you
personally.

Confess

Where do
you see
yourself in
this story?

WRITTEN BY
MR. PETER PARK

2

Bartimaeus

MARK 10:46-52



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

When I was a kid, I would often freeze (pardon the pun) at an ice cream shop when the staff asked, “What can I do for you today?” There were just too many choices! These days, I’ve traded the ice cream shop for a bakery. I can’t say no to a good one!

I visited a new bakery recently, and there it was again: “What can I do for you today?” As I stood there trying to decide, I struck up a conversation with the baker. Before I left, he called out, “Don’t go yet. I have something for you.” He handed me a container of freshly made baklava and said, “It’s on me.”

For you.

When we hear those words, they usually carry a posture of generosity. An offering, a gift, a willingness to serve. Sometimes it sounds like, “I’ll do that *for you*,” or “I can take care of that *for you*.”

All throughout Scripture, we see that same posture in Christ. A posture of asking, of offering, of moving toward us first, even before we fully know how to respond.

We see this clearly at the end of the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, just before His triumphal entry. The crowds are gathering for Passover, full of expectation. Many of His followers perhaps hoping He has come to overthrow Rome. But before reaching Jerusalem, Jesus passes through Jericho. As He leaves the city, we meet Bartimaeus, a blind beggar sitting by the roadside.

Jericho was a wealthy city, which makes the scene even more striking. A rich city, yet a man in deep need sits nearby. Bartimaeus positions himself where he will be seen, where travelers pass by, hoping for mercy and compassion.

And when he hears that Jesus is near, he cries out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

The crowd tries to silence him. Surely this Messiah has more important matters to attend to than a blind beggar. But Bartimaeus cries out all the more.

There’s an irony here: while the crowd is focused on perhaps a political savior, blind Bartimaeus sees more clearly than they do. He recognizes that he is in the presence of the merciful King.

When Jesus calls him forward, we’re told that Bartimaeus throws aside his cloak, jumps up, and comes to Jesus.

Contrast this with the rich man earlier in the chapter, who walks away sorrowful when asked to give up everything. Bartimaeus, by comparison, casts aside perhaps the only thing he owns and rushes toward Jesus.

And then comes the question:

“What do you want me to do *for you?*” There it is again: “*for you*”

Jesus stops. He gives His full attention. The King speaks personally to a man the crowd tried to ignore. This is the kind of kingdom Jesus brings. A kingdom where the King serves.

Interestingly, Jesus asks this exact same question just a few verses earlier in Mark 10:36. But there, James and John are asking for glory, for positions of honor. In response, Jesus teaches them that true greatness is found in servanthood: “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant ... For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (vv. 43, 45)

Here in Jericho, isn't it interesting how we are on the same road as Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. In many ways, Jesus embodies the kind of mercy we see in that story, one who stops, draws near, and cares for the one others pass by. The posture of servanthood starts inwardly while expressed outwardly. What Jesus has done, on the cross, is not just for a moment, or for a select few. It is for you. For all of us. For many.

Do you know that God is for you? That even before you turned toward Him, He was waiting for you? The cross was for you. It was for me. “For God so loved the world.” [John 3:16]

And this “for you” posture doesn't stop with Jesus. It continues through His people. As the Church, we are called to embody that same posture in the world. We are a people who have been served by Christ, and now are sent to serve others in His name.

As Paul writes in Philippians 2, we are called to have that same mindset. To live with humility, to consider others above ourselves, and to serve as Christ served. To have the same attitude as Christ.

WRITTEN BY
LIEUTENANT
JENELLE DURDLE

3

A Sinful Woman

LUKE 7:36-50



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

The first image in this passage is of a group of religious leaders gathered around a dining table to eat and discuss religious law. This is an ordinary occurrence for the time. Jesus joining the Pharisees to eat and discuss religious teaching is expected, non-controversial, and in line with cultural norms and expectations. Then something shifts, an uninvited woman enters the scene. Her gender is important because it amplifies the social inappropriateness of the situation. She does not belong at this table; she is known to be sinful and unclean. Her presence and actions at the dining table stand in opposition to the cultural norms and expectations. She is weeping over Jesus and kissing Jesus' feet. She has exposed her hair and is using her hair as a towel to dry his feet; the entire room is filled with the aroma of perfume as she anoints Jesus.

This image is no longer ordinary, the woman's response to Jesus commands the attention of the room, it is impossible to look away or ignore. The entire tone of the gathering shifts, religious discussion and debate is overtaken by tears, exposure of self, vulnerable adoration, and a fragrant offering of love.

Read Luke 7:36-50 slowly 2 or 3 times, pausing to breathe and pray between each reading.

Notice what is happening in your thinking as you read. Do you have questions or ideas, perhaps you are making connections between this passage and your life. Notice what is happening in your emotions. Are you remembering times of vulnerability and emotional encounters with Christ in your own life, perhaps you remember a time when you were witness to the emotional encounter of another. Then notice what is happening in your body, are you uncomfortable, is your heart beating faster, are you bored and ready to move to the next thing, perhaps you long for more time and space to sit with the passage and be with Jesus in this way, do tears come to your eyes? Consider the passage with an awareness of how it impacts you, your thoughts, your emotions, and your body.

Luke 7:36-50 describes the interactions between three characters, who do you

resonate with more? Simon the host: an influential religious leader who questions Jesus' engagement with the sinful woman. The sinful woman: a forgiven soul who defies social norms to demonstrate her love for Jesus with vulnerability and self-exposure. Jesus: the one who creates a safe space for vulnerability and self-exposure, the one who offers peace and the forgiveness of sins.

For me this passage always brings me to times in my youth when I wept at the altar. I remember clearly when my pastor spoke words of forgiveness over me. It was one of the most powerful moments of my life. I remember being received with care and a genuine Christ like compassion. The love of Christ I encountered that day has been an anchor throughout my spiritual journey.

I am no longer a vulnerable teenager. I am now a spiritual leader who often has a seat at the table, and within a team I help "set the table" welcoming others to come and meet with Jesus. As a spiritual leader I long for spaces where we can freely express our love and adoration for Christ, and it is my heart's desire for our communities to be spaces where we experience the peace of Christ together. The woman in Luke 7:36-50 inspires and challenges me as I respond to the love of Christ in my life and journey with others in their response to Christ.

As you go through your day and reflect on the passage, I invite you to consider the following questions.

What does a posture of vulnerable adoration of Jesus look like for a leader in our context as The Salvation Army?

How can we create safety and be trauma-informed in the way we invite people to encounter Jesus with vulnerability and self-exposure?

Is there space for tears, exposure of self, vulnerable adoration, and a fragrant offering of love to shift the tone of our discussions and debates?

PRAYER JOURNAL

Praise

What does
this
encounter
reveal about
Jesus?

**Give
Thanks**

Thank Jesus
for how He
has met you
personally.

Confess

Where do
you see
yourself in
this story?

A grid of 15 columns and 15 rows of small dots for journaling.

WRITTEN BY
CAPTAIN JOSH CAIN

4

Disciples

LUKE 8:22-25



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

“I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer.” – Paul Maud’Dib

In Frank Herbert’s sci-fi epic *Dune* the main character Paul uses these words as a mental tool to overcome and master the fear within himself. In order to be the hero of the story he must master his fear, push through the weakness of his mind, and set about righting wrongs with his mental fortitude. Only, as you and I know, that is not how real life operates. Fear is not always as simple as mind-over-matter. We all have fears: mine is a fear of spiders. And while this feels like a fear I can manage, that is much harder to do with the real fears that we come up against in life: illness, accidents, the storms that we face. When these fears close in upon us, we can try and push through; try to be stoic, try to brave it on our own. But we’ll only discover that fear isn’t banished by suppressing it or soldiering on, but by letting it encounter the peace of Christ.

We see this clear in our text from Luke’s gospel. Jesus and His disciples have embarked on a journey by boat across the Sea of Galilee, when they are met with a storm. Now this is not simply a strong breeze or some choppy waves here. If that was all it was, then the disciples could have navigated these waters, after all they are familiar with these shores. But rather, we are told that the boat has begun filling with water. The ship that Jesus and the disciples are in is actively going down. This is a scene of panicked frenzy. These men are afraid. As the boat fills with water, their hearts are filled with fear.

As author Anthony Bloom notes “at a certain moment they lose heart, the storm that was outside comes inside – the storm is within them too. Anguish, death no longer simply circle round, they come inside.” Bloom describes well the change that happens within the disciples: How fear enters their hearts. What had begun as an ordinary sailing across the lake had morphed into a life-or-death scenario. Our text doesn’t tell us what steps they take to try and keep the boat afloat, but it does show us that by the time they go and wake Jesus up, they have reached their end. They’re panicked, they are afraid, and they can’t believe that Jesus is sleeping through all of this. How can He be so calm? How can He be so peaceful? Doesn’t He care that we are all about to die?

I think, if we are honest, we can often encounter Jesus in the same way. We find ourselves in circumstances that grip us with fear and panic, and instead of turning to Jesus, we try to fix it first. While we can't know what the disciples did to try and survive the storm, we know that they eventually realize Jesus was aboard, and in desperation, they go and wake Him up. In the same way, we go looking for Him only once our own efforts have failed, and our own options and resources are exhausted. For whatever reason, we get caught up in everything going on in the storm around us, and forget that Jesus is on the boat with us. He is already in the midst of our storms.

We see the immediate effect Jesus' presence has. He rebukes and calms the waves; He brings peace and calm to the storm the disciples had been certain would claim their lives. Because, at the end of the day, as we and the disciples are learning, Jesus is Lord over these storms and He is able to banish them. We fight with our fears, our storms, thinking our resolution is enough; and yet it is only when we go to Christ through prayer that we encounter peace for our souls.

Prayer is our anchor for life's storms - it is the tool given to us. We seek Jesus, not just when we have run out of options but as the first person that we go to. Jesus should be our first response, not just our last resort. As the old hymn puts it best, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." Fear may be the mind killer, but Jesus is the source of all life.

Consider if you, like the disciples, have ever tried to solve a problem first before going to Jesus.

How does our fear get in the way of the peace Christ wants for us to know?

WRITTEN BY
DR. KEVIN SLOUS

5

Zacchaeus

LUKE 19:1-10



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

Have you ever wanted to see where God was leading, and just couldn't seem to see Him because everything else was crowding out your vision? Things of life, looming large, preventing you from getting close to the One you desperately need to catch sight of. Your perspective and view of God, and His will in your life, is impeded by finances, pressures at work and at home, by issues facing your world, by past hurts, or guilt... and you just can't see.

Or maybe, you think you already know what you're looking for, and just want a clear indication of what it is God might be calling you to. But life — things you can control, and those you can't — are keeping you at a distance. You find yourself present at church, but not fully present in worship. Songs of adoration are sung without thought and also on autopilot. You want something more, but you find yourself at a distance.

Maybe this is some of what Zacchaeus was experiencing leading up to his encounter with Jesus recorded in Luke 19:1-10.

Zacchaeus finds himself wanting to see Jesus: "He wanted to see who Jesus was" (v. 3). Maybe he'd heard about Jesus, or was simply drawn to the commotion of the crowds, but he didn't know Jesus. He wanted to see who He was.

Scripture notes that Zacchaeus "was short" and "could not see over the crowd." His vision and view were obstructed by circumstances out of his control. But there were some conditions he could change for himself. Luke records that "he ran ahead [of the crowd] and climbed a sycamore tree" in order to get a better vantage point. But this still kept him at a distance from Jesus.

And then...

Jesus stops near the tree Zacchaeus had climbed, and called for him to come close. But this call wasn't for Zacchaeus to "go, and do something." It was a self-invitation — an invitation of an encounter. Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name.

"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

We're told Zacchaeus "came down at once and welcomed him gladly."

The interesting thing is, Luke's account never tells us that Jesus ever made it to Zacchaeus' house. It says that people began to grumble about the kind of person's house Jesus had just invited Himself to and was now on the way to visit. But it's here that we read of Zacchaeus' response — not once they've arrived, settled in, had a meal, gotten to know the family. It's on the way — in the midst of all that Zacchaeus had tried to either avoid or overcome, that he comes to know within himself what he has to do next: "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." (v. 8)

Jesus didn't ask this of him. This response didn't come after a deeply probing conversation on injustice or a pointed call to turn over a new leaf. The miracle of salvation comes (vv. 9-10) when Zacchaeus repents — turns towards God in the person of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit does His work within Zacchaeus' heart, bringing him to new life. He is new, and his response is new. He knows what Jesus is calling him to, even though he hasn't been told. And Jesus commends his faith and response.

Just as we have seen Zacchaeus in our own desires for understanding Christ's call and the obstacles that we feel are preventing us from seeing more clearly, perhaps we can likewise see ourselves in the encounter that initiated Zacchaeus' response.

Maybe the call we're expecting, isn't the call Jesus is giving. We look for a next step, for answers to questions of life, love and purpose. But Jesus simply calls us to Himself, and invites Himself to be present in our home — whatever that might look like presently.

And if we truly respond, gladly to his self-invitation, we open the door for God's Spirit to do His work within us —and through us — as well.

Jesus calls us to abide. He invites Himself to be present — to abide in us, before He calls us to "go and do." This is the encounter that can transform all that follows.

Zacchaeus wasn't called to do what he did in response to Jesus' self-invitation to him. He did it because of the encounter with Jesus. And by faith, we can find what He calls us to, by being open to His invitation to encounter Him too.

Can you remember your first “encounter” with Jesus (when He became part of your life in a meaning full way)? What did His call to relationship look like?

What changed or was transformed through His “coming to your home”?

What does His invitation to draw near to you, call you to?

WRITTEN BY
REV. DR.
ROB FRINGER

6

The Road to Emmaus

LUKE 24:13-35



PHOTO FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE BY LUMO PROJECT

Words have power. In the right hands (or rather, from the right mouths) they can bring honor, healing, and collaborative good. In the wrong hands, they can bring shame, hurt, and be used to manipulate others for selfish gains. Jesus's words in Scripture are a masterclass in the power of words, and Luke 24:13-35 (The Walk to Emmaus) is no exception.

As He often does, Jesus began with questions: "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" and "What things?" (vv. 17, 19). These questions were an invitation to enter conversation and relationship. Jesus met these two followers where they were; He understood their anxiety and fear and gave them the opportunity to verbalize them. Jesus disarmed, listened, and when the time was right, He spoke again. "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (v. 25).

At first reading, these words may appear harsh. Yet, they were motivated by love. Jesus's words were often direct and the more knowledgeable (or powerful) one purported to be, the more ruthless they could appear. But the desire was always the same—to see people turn toward Him and away from words and actions that subjugated others or propagated untruths.

As we can see, these two followers didn't get defensive; they remained engaged in the conversation and the relationship grew because of it. So much so, that they invited Jesus to stay with them and to enjoy a meal together. Their willingness to welcome Jesus into a conversation, to listen and learn, and to walk this journey with Him, led to the blessing of having their eyes open and being able to recognize who Jesus was.

There are so many lessons we can learn from this story; here are four.

First, Jesus desires to walk next to each and every person, to enter meaningful conversation with them, and to see them transformed. This is who God is (1 John 4:8), why Jesus came (John 3:16), and why the Holy Spirit was sent (John 15:26). Never doubt this truth, whether you are looking in the mirror or looking at a stranger across the road.

Second, conversations with Jesus are not always easy, but they can be transformative. Scripture and prayer are our lifelines. They are doorways to the conversations that God wants to have with us and that we need to have with God. We need to learn to listen more, to hear the questions Jesus is asking us, and to sit still through the often-difficult conversations that make us want to run the other way. This is what it means to walk with Jesus. This is the pathway to a deeper relationship with Him were we see Him, and in so doing, see ourselves anew.

Third, our journey with Jesus was meant to be taken with others. The two friends on the road to Emmaus shared life with one another. When times were hard, they walked closer together and carried one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). We need others who will tread the ups and downs of life with us, who will listen well, and who will speak hard truths to us from a place of compassion and love. We need to be that kind of person for others.

Fourth, never underestimate the power of your words. As James reminds us, an evil tongue "corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:6). In a world where it is commonplace to spew hate, make empty promises, and disregard the impact of our words upon others, Christians must do better. We must use our words for good; we must use them for God. As we "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), we will grow closer to God and to others, and we will make a positive impact for the Kingdom.

PRAYER JOURNAL

Praise

What does
this
encounter
reveal about
Jesus?

**Give
Thanks**

Thank Jesus
for how He
has met you
personally.

Confess

Where do
you see
yourself in
this story?

WRITTEN BY
LIEUTENANT
MIYA BRADBURN

7

Nathanael

JOHN 1:43-51



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

“YOU’RE NEVER GOING TO BELIEVE THIS...”

Perhaps out of the blue, a friend has shared some big news with you. Right away, your disbelief is primed and ready—incredulity is a logical response, considering your friend did lead with “*You’re never going to believe this...*” And yet, when we start a conversation with these particular words, we are seeking to be believed, because as incredible as our news may seem, it is true!

These words are not spoken by Philip to his friend, but you almost get the sense that he might have said them, particularly given Nathanael’s skeptical response: “*Has anything good ever come from Nazareth?*” But Philip has had an encounter with the Messiah. Emmanuel—God—is with us, Nathanael! He was excited to share this news with his friend; yet, for all Philip’s excitement, Nathanael’s response shows that he was unmoved.

Undeterred by his friend’s incredulity, Philip changes course from telling Nathanael about who he saw, and directly, simply, says, “*Come and see.*”

COME AND SEE

We can also look at this story through another, more personal lens: what if I, myself, a Christ-follower, need a fresh encounter with Jesus? We sometimes find ourselves in seasons of discouragement, actively distancing ourselves from the Lord. But we can also find ourselves in seasons of “numbness”. We could be going to church every Sunday, reading the Bible, and doing devotions every day. But if we’re being honest, we are just “going through the motions”: we are showing up, but we are not truly present. If this describes you now, there is encouragement for you in Nathanael’s story.

Several things point to Nathanael being a person who does want to be close to God. When Philip approaches him, he says, “We have found Him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” This implies that Nathanael has been studying Scripture—in particular, prophetic, messianic texts. We, too, have perhaps been studying Scripture, not for the same purpose—we know

Jesus has come—but we are in the Word, just like Nathanael.

As noted earlier, one would expect Nathanael—someone studying Scripture, waiting, searching for this foretold Messiah—to leap at Philip’s news. But he didn’t. Even when Nathanael comes face-to-face with Jesus, even when Jesus calls him a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit, *still* Nathanael questions: “*Where did you get to know me?*” It’s not until Jesus tells him that He saw *him* under the fig tree, before Philip called him, that Nathanael realizes just who is standing before him—the son of God, the king of Israel!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that “the Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.” Maybe Nathanael was discouraged, comparing Philip’s sure faith to his shaky one. It took Jesus seeking out Nathanael *first*, knowing the state of his heart, even commending his candor, for him to really see Jesus for who He truly was.

Perhaps you can relate to Nathanael’s reactions, both to his friend, Philip, and to his Lord, Jesus. Have you been comparing the faith of your fellow siblings-in-Christ to your own and finding yourself coming up short? Or perhaps you have been feeling unseen by Jesus these days, wondering if He has even noticed where you have been. Take heart that as Nathanael could frankly ask, “Where did you get to know me?”, you can approach Jesus with a pointed, heartfelt question: “Where have you seen me lately, Jesus?” And as He answered Nathanael, be assured that He will answer you, too. The Psalmist reminds us: “He is near to those who call to Him, who call to Him with *sincerity*. He supplies the *needs* of those who honor Him; He hears their cries and saves them.” (Psalm 145:18-19)

Jesus sees us, and in the times when we feel like He doesn’t, when we feel like we can’t see *Him*, it is then when His invitation to us is: *Come and see, again*. Jesus is waiting—patiently, persistently—for you to see Him once again. And not only that.. you’ll see even greater things (John 1:50). *That* is a promise!

In what areas of life have you been feeling unseen by Jesus?

What heartfelt question(s) do you need to ask Jesus?

PRAYER JOURNAL

Praise

What does
this
encounter
reveal about
Jesus?

**Give
Thanks**

Thank Jesus
for how He
has met you
personally.

Confess

Where do
you see
yourself in
this story?

A grid of 15 columns and 15 rows of small dots for journaling.

WRITTEN BY
MRS. SHONA BURDITT

8

Woman at the Well

JOHN 4:4-30



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

Take a minute and imagine the scene. It's noon, the sun is high, the heat is unbearable, there is dust everywhere. Everyone is inside, completing their daily tasks in the cooler shade and yet, you watch a woman carry a heavy water jug, walking towards the well.

You can imagine how hard this task is at the best of times, made worse by the time of day and the fact that she is doing this alone. You think to yourself, "why is she here at this time, why didn't she come with the rest of the women in the early morning?" You then realize who this woman is. She is the one they all talk about, the unmarried one, the shameful one, the one that you don't want to be caught talking to.

You watch as she approaches the well and then pauses. She can see that there is someone already there, and looking closely, you see that is a Jewish man. As a Samaritan, she knows how Jewish people see her kind, but she needs the water. She adjusts her water jug and walks over, keen to get on with her task and will deal with whatever this is.

You are compelled to watch how this all plays out.

You watch them talking and as the scene unfolds, you see her face as it fills with curiosity, followed by shame and then suddenly, you see her face change with a flash of recognition, then disbelief, ending with a "could this be?" She then runs off from the well, shouting and gathering her neighbors, her utter disregard for how these people have made her feel. She is compelling, bringing them out of their homes to hear her story of how this man truly saw who she was and how she believes He is the Messiah.

Her excitement, her joy draws you in and you too want to meet this man she has just encountered.

This story in John isn't a cautionary tale about a sinful woman, condemned for her actions. In fact, the Bible isn't very clear about how she has earned this reputation of being an outcast or what happened to her husbands.

We do know that drawing water in the middle of the day by herself would show that she didn't feel welcome to join with the other women. She picked a time in the day where she could avoid running into others who would treat her with contempt and avoid the shame that would bring her.

This story is about immeasurable grace, a clear hunger from this woman to know the Messiah and how Jesus used her to be one of the very first evangelists.

Jesus doesn't shy away from conversing with her, as most Jewish men would with a Samaritan woman. He gives her the opportunity to serve Him with water, and in turn, offers her a transformed life, one that has purpose and fulfillment. He sees her fully, sins and all, and meets her where she is. He confronts her complicated sinful past without condemnation, demonstrating to her and to us that His grace sees past our mistakes to offer us restoration in Him.

How often do we believe our past disqualifies us for a future with Him? That because of what we have done, we are not worthy of His grace and His mercy?

This woman's encounter with Jesus at the well is a beautiful reminder that He sees us, calls us, restores us and gives us purpose, no matter what our past. He uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things for His kingdom.

As you read this passage of scripture, reflect on where you feel you are at with Jesus. What beliefs do you hold about yourself that you may feel disqualify you from His grace and mercy? Write them down, say them aloud and leave them at His feet, knowing that His grace and mercy are gifts freely given to you.

How can you share this gift of living water with others? Consider how you can share your own story of grace with someone who needs it.

PRAYER JOURNAL

Praise

What does
this
encounter
reveal about
Jesus?

**Give
Thanks**

Thank Jesus
for how He
has met you
personally.

Confess

Where do
you see
yourself in
this story?

A grid of 15 columns and 15 rows of small dots for journaling.

WRITTEN BY
MAJOR
MICHELLE MERCER

9

The Five Thousand

JOHN 6:1-13



Encounters are often catalysts for change. An encounter with Jesus always brings transformation. One moment with Jesus completely changes people and, sometimes, their circumstances.

Jesus feeding the five thousand is one such moment. If you are Sunday School alumni, then it is a familiar story. You may recall paper cut-outs of bread baskets and fish, or broken dinner rolls and sardines passed around to demonstrate the miracle. Even without an early introduction and demonstration, the miraculous moment - when Jesus feeds five thousand people - surely makes it to the top ten of most well-known stories of Jesus' earthly ministry.

After an intense and fruitful time of teaching and performing many miracles, Jesus and His disciples relocate to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. In his gospel, John quickly points out that a huge crowd followed them, motivated by the miracles and signs they saw Jesus perform.

John then gives a brief note of context- The Jewish Passover Festival was near (John 6:4). It is easy to pass over this quickly and think, "Oh, okay," but John is weaving the threads of Israel's experience of God in history, together with the unfolding miracle of Jesus. At Passover, the Children of Israel remember God's provision of manna in the desert and, while Jesus is about to multiply five small barley loaves and two fish to feed their physical hunger, He is revealing Himself as the Bread of Life who came down from heaven to fully satisfy spiritual hunger. What God provided in the desert was miraculous but temporary; what Jesus offers is miraculous and eternal.

With the hungry crowd standing before Him and His miracle plan already in mind, Jesus draws His disciples into the moment so they can not only witness but participate in the miracle that is about to happen. He engages Philip with the question of where to purchase bread to feed the multitude. Philip answers logically that even if they had eight month's wages at their disposal, it would not buy enough bread for everyone to have one bite. Philip spent time with Jesus and saw Him perform many miracles, but in this moment, He evaluates from a rational perspective. Philip saw the situation, the size of the problem, and focused on the impossibility.

Assessing the situation, Andrew steps forward to present a resource analysis. He brings to Jesus an unnamed boy with a one-person combo: five small barley loaves and two small fish. Showing the scarcity of resources, Andrew responds to Jesus with a question, “but how far will they go among so many?” (John 6:9). Andrews’ analysis is realistic, but he also underestimates the One who stands among them.

Already knowing what He is going to do, Jesus includes Philip, Andrew, and the other disciples by asking them to have the people sit down. Jesus is not hurried nor does He rush the moment - a miracle is unfolding; Jesus is orchestrating it and keeping His disciples involved.

While not explicit, it is implied that the lad with the lunch surrenders to Jesus what he has. Jesus then takes the boy’s meagre provision in His hands. Always living in close communion with the Father, Jesus pauses to acknowledge God as the giver of all good gifts and gives thanks.

In John’s gospel, it is Jesus who distributes the bread and fish to the waiting crowd and as He does, the miracle occurs. As Jesus passes the food, the supply does not run out. As one piece is taken, another emerges. Not only is there enough for everyone but, true to who Jesus is, there is more than enough.

In this encounter with Jesus, God abundantly provides for the crowd who followed, for the disciples who participate, and for the boy who surrenders his lunch. An encounter with Jesus moves them all from scarcity to sufficiency. Jesus meets their needs-providing the necessities and even more. The abundance of Jesus’ miraculous feeding is not squandered but gathered by the disciples into twelve baskets for another time. In times of plenty, grateful use of everything Jesus provides is the appropriate response.

By the miracle of God’s grace, we encounter Jesus as Savior and Lord of our lives. With His good purposes in mind, Jesus invites us to bring what we have, place it in His hands, and join Him as He works in our world. We can step into these moments with Jesus from a place of humble surrender and expectant faith knowing that He will provide.

As I seek Jesus, what are the motives of my heart? Is my focus on who He is or what He can provide?

What is Jesus asking me to surrender into His hands - even if it seems insufficient or inadequate?

Is there an invitation in this story for me to join Jesus where He is already at work?

WRITTEN BY
CAPTAIN
BHREAGH ROWE

10

Mary Magdalene

JOHN 20:10-18



PHOTO FROM ADOBE STOCK

She lingers. She looks in again. She asks questions. She tries to make sense of what feels broken. And in the middle of that grief, Jesus meets her. But she doesn't recognize Him.

She is close but not aware.
Near but not seeing.

And it's not because she lacks faith. It's because she is grieving.

Grief has a way of shaping what we can see. She is standing in the presence of Jesus but still interpreting the moment through the lens of loss.

And so, she keeps searching for what she thinks is missing. Still trying to fix what feels broken. Still trying to solve it. And then Jesus says her name. "Mary."

No explanation. No correction. Just her name. And everything shifts.

Because Jesus is not first recognized through clarity. He is recognized through relationship.

The same voice that had once called her out of darkness now meets her in her grief. The same voice that restored her identity now calls her again right in the middle of her pain.

And suddenly, she sees.

Not because the situation makes sense yet—but because He does. And what happens next matters. Jesus doesn't wait. He doesn't tell her to come back when she feels better. He doesn't tell her to process everything first. He sends her.

The woman who was just crying at the tomb becomes the first messenger of the resurrection.

Not after she recovers., not after she proves she's ready. Right there, in the same moment.

And that's where this presses into our lives.

Because we still carry this belief that our pain puts things on pause. That calling is something we step into after we're healed, after we're steady, after we feel ready. But Mary's story tells us something different. Jesus doesn't separate her grief from her calling. He meets her in one and speaks into the other.

And I think back to those kitchen floor moments not as the focus, but as the place where this truth became real. Because what I felt there was not distance from God, it was closeness I didn't recognize at first. I wasn't outside of His presence in that moment.

I was in it.

And maybe that's what we miss. We assume that if we feel overwhelmed, confused, or undone, then God must be far. But what if we are closer than we think? What if He is already there drawing near, speaking gently, waiting for the moment we recognize His voice?

Mary thought she was alone. She wasn't.

She thought she was at the end. She wasn't.

She thought she was looking for something that had been taken. All along, she was being found.

And when she was, nothing about her emotional state disqualified her from what came next.

She was still called.

Still chosen.

Still sent.

Your pain does not change your calling.

It didn't for her.

It doesn't for you.

You don't have to wait until you feel strong again.

You don't have to wait until everything makes sense.

He meets you as you are.

And even here - you are still called.

WRITTEN BY
MAJOR
TIM ANDREWS

11

Thomas

JOHN 20:24-29



If you have spent any time around church, you have probably heard the phrase “Doubting Thomas,” and it is rarely meant as a compliment. It makes Thomas sound like the disciple who just could not believe; the one behind everyone else. Honestly, that feels unfair. Imagine if your worst moment became your lifelong nickname. Thomas gets one moment, and it sticks! Brutal! The more I sit with John 20:24–29, the more I think Thomas was not against faith; he simply did not want fake faith. He did not want to pretend something was real simply because others said it was. He wanted to know it for himself. And many of us can relate to that. Some people connect quickly; others need time, space, and questions. That does not make their faith weaker; it means it is becoming real in a different way.

That is exactly where Thomas finds himself. The other disciples have seen the risen Jesus. John says, “As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). They saw; they experienced; their faith was formed through encounter. But Thomas was not there. So, when they tell him, “We have seen the Lord,” he responds, “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” (John 20:25).

At first glance, that sounds like doubt, but if we look closer, we find that Thomas is asking for what the others already received. He is not asking for something extraordinary; he is asking for equal footing. More than that, Thomas refuses second-hand faith. He is saying, “This has to be real for me.” Throughout Scripture, faith is not about borrowing someone else’s experience of God; it is about encounter. Moses meets God at the burning bush, Elijah hears Him in a whisper, and Mary recognizes Jesus when He speaks her name. Faith becomes real through encounter, not second-hand information.

Then comes the turning point. Jesus appears again, and when He does, He does not shame Thomas or rebuke him harshly. Instead, He meets him exactly where he is. “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!” (John 20:27). Jesus is not threatened by Thomas’s questions.

He comes close into his uncertainty. And Thomas responds with one of the strongest confessions in the Gospel: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The one often labeled as the doubter ends up declaring the deepest truth. His journey through doubt does not weaken his faith; it deepens it.

This matters for us because people encounter Jesus in different ways. Mary recognizes Him when He speaks her name; the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognize Him in the breaking of bread; the other disciples believe when they see His wounds; Thomas needs to see and touch. The common thread is not the method; it is encounter. God is not running a formula; He is forming a relationship. Your journey does not have to look like anyone else’s to be real. It means Jesus may be meeting you in a way that is personal. I relate to Thomas more than I once thought. Often things become real for me not through my thinking or my feeling, but through my tangible experiences; through slowing down and becoming present to the moment.

So, here is the invitation. You do not have to figure everything out. You do not have to force something you do not feel. You do not have to pretend your faith is further along than it is. You can come honestly. You can come like Thomas and say, “Jesus, I want this to be real for me.” Because the good news of this story is not that Thomas finally got it right; it is that Jesus came close enough for encounter, right into the questions, right into the uncertainty, right into the place where faith was still forming. And if that was true for Thomas, it can be true for you. Jesus is not waiting for you to figure it all out; He is ready to meet you right where you are.

PRAYER JOURNAL

Praise

What does
this
encounter
reveal about
Jesus?

**Give
Thanks**

Thank Jesus
for how He
has met you
personally.

Confess

Where do
you see
yourself in
this story?

WRITTEN BY
LIEUTENANT
ZACH MARSHALL

12

Peter

JOHN 21:1-17



PHOTO FROM THE CHOSEN

The charcoal fire must have stirred something deep in Peter's memory.

The last time he had stood warming himself beside one of those fires, he had denied knowing Jesus – not once, but three times. And now, in the grey light of early morning on the shores of Galilee, here was another fire, another chance, and Jesus standing on the beach asking an almost unbearable question.

The disciples had gone back to fishing. It's what you do when you don't know what else to do. The resurrection had happened, yes ... but what now? For Peter especially, there was unfinished business. Failure has a way of making us retreat to the familiar, to the things that once defined us, as if we might outrun what we've done.

But Jesus doesn't let us outrun grace. He meets us on the shore.

After breakfast, Jesus turned to Peter and asked, "*Do you love me?*" Three times. Once for each denial. Not to shame Peter, but to restore him, to look him in the eyes and say, I know who you are, all of it, and *I am still calling you*.

Each answer Peter gave was met not with a list of conditions or a probationary period, but with a commission: *Feed my lambs. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep*. The call to love Jesus and the call to serve others were inseparable. They always are.

If you find yourself sensing a call, a persistent nudge toward something more, a deepening sense that God is beckoning you forward, you will likely understand something of Peter's experience. Perhaps you, too, are aware of your failures, your inconsistencies, the ways you have fallen short. Perhaps the very boldness of the call feels disproportionate to what you know of yourself.

That is precisely where Jesus meets us.

The calling of God is never a reward for those who have proven themselves worthy. It is an invitation extended to those who have been broken and restored, who have met grace at the point of their greatest need, and who therefore carry something real

to offer a hurting world. Peter's qualification for shepherding God's people was not his strength; it was his encounter with the One who is.

Notice, too, what Jesus did not say. He did not ask Peter to have it all figured out. He did not demand a five-year plan or a polished vision statement. He simply asked: *Do you love me?* That is the foundation. Everything else – the structures, the appointments, the sacrifice, the long years of service – everything flows from the answer to that one question.

And then came the words that reorient everything: *“Follow me.”* Not “go and serve” as a solo project but *follow*. “Walk with Me, stay close, let your ministry be born out of relationship, not obligation.”

My experience of grace and of answering the call to ministry is that it is a life surrendered, not a career chosen. It is love expressed rather than a role assumed. Calling is not something we manufacture through ambition or willpower. It is something we receive, in the quiet moments when we are honest enough to hear it.

Whatever you have done, wherever you have been, Jesus is standing on the shore of your life today, with bread, with fire, with grace, asking the same question He asked a fisherman two thousand years ago.

Your answer is the beginning of everything.

ENCOUNTERS

WRITTEN BY MAJOR CARSON DECKER

Different people.
Different stories.
Different circumstances.

Yet the same **Jesus**.

The **Jesus** who heals.
The **Jesus** who sees.
The **Jesus** who forgives.
The **Jesus** who provides.
The **Jesus** who restores.
The **Jesus** who calls people by name.

Because every encounter with **Jesus**
is an invitation.

An invitation from fear to faith.
From blindness to sight.
From shame to grace.
From scarcity to abundance.

And the story is not finished.
Because these are not only their encounters.
They are ours.

For every person still reaching through the crowd.
Every person crying out beside the road.
Every person carrying regret to the well.
Every person standing in the storm.
Every person staring at an empty hope.

Jesus is still meeting people.
Still transforming lives.
Still turning ordinary moments into holy encounters.

And one encounter with **Jesus**
can change anything.

WE EXTEND OUR HEARTELT THANKS TO EACH CONTRIBUTOR WHOSE THOUGHTFUL REFLECTIONS HAVE ENRICHED THIS DEVOTIONAL RESOURCE.

CAPTAIN JOYCE DOWNER

MR. PETER PARK

LIEUTENANT JENELLE DURDLE

CAPTAIN JOSH CAIN

DR. KEVIN SLOUS

REV. DR. ROB FRINGER

LIEUTENANT MIYA BRADBURN

MRS. SHONA BURDITT

MAJOR MICHELLE MERCER

CAPTAIN BHREAGH ROWE

MAJOR TIM ANDREWS

LIEUTENANT ZACH MARSHALL

WITH GRATITUDE



