

An Answer Guide

to

A Bible Study for Your Easter Journey

Companion to *Running to the Empty Tomb*

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Introduction

Do you feel that Easter weekend passes, and you missed something important? How would you like the basket of colorful eggs and family around the table to be richer this Easter, to look with eagerness and renewed gratitude for the cross? Welcome to the path to the empty tomb, where, together, we can refresh our joy in Jesus' death and resurrection.

This Bible study is unique. It is a three-dimensional study that will engage your mind, spirit, and body.

Your mind will glean Biblical principles. Sharp questions will guide you to see biblical connections to your life.

Your spirit will meditate on the principles. The Holy Spirit will ignite your spirit with deeper understanding and melt your heart for change.

You will live in your body differently. The Holy Spirit will teach you in every-day situations how to apply the principles that renewed your mind and pricked your spirit.

This Bible study is also different in its use of intentions. An intention is an activity you will choose to give up or take up for a seven week period before Easter. During the study your intention will be God's tool to frequently remind of your quest to grasp His greatest proof of love for you.

I recommend that the study be used as a companion to the devotional, **Running to the Empty Tomb: Finding the Joy in Easter**, though the study and the devotional may each be used by themselves. Each lesson in the Bible study will list the devotions from the week which correlate with the Bible study.

I also urge you to use the study with one or more persons. The Bible study leader may assign the study to be completed before class or, as our group did, complete the study together during the meeting. **The study should begin the week before Ash Wednesday, eight weeks before Easter.** (February 24, 2019 - March 3, 2019)

*Resources used to formulate the answers given include **Matthew Henry's Commentary** and **The Reformation Study Bible** from **BibleGateway.com** as well as **Calvin's Commentaries** found on **BibleHub.com***

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Chapter 1: Knowing the History and Biblical Precedents for Lent

This study is different as explained in the Introduction. In addition, each week you will answer a Question of the Day which has no right or wrong answer. Some questions relate to the study, and others are simply fun.

In a group, each person answers the question in a minute or less. Hearing from every person gives opportunities for connecting to each other, for giving quieter folks a safe space to speak and be heard, and for hearing different perspectives. Taking turns in seating order will ensure that everyone is given full attention.

Question of the Day

How did you attempt to keep Christ in Christmas this past year?

Answers will vary.

What is Lent, How Did It Get Started, and is It for All Christians?

Many scholars believe the apostles started the practice of Lent by preparing for Easter through fasting, self-examination, and repentance. In the early church, converts were baptized on Easter. They prepared through fasting and self-examination for baptism, so whether the fasts were tied more to Easter or to baptisms is not clear.

The length of fasts ranged from 40 hours to 40 days. The nature of the fasts varied too, from an extreme of fasting of all food and drink to the opposite extreme of only excluding meat on certain days.

Church leaders met at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and discussed setting a unified fasting period for Easter. A church-wide, 40 day preparation period for Easter resulted, a period called Lent. Still, how Christians fasted was not consistent throughout the church.

In Acts, the church set aside Sundays to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, so Gregory the Great changed Lent to exempt Sundays from the fast. He added six days to Lent to maintain a 40 day fast and to continue Sunday celebrations.

Beginning Lent earlier shifted Lent to begin on Wednesday. Gregory the Great named the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, because he marked Christians' foreheads with ashes, a symbol of repentance.

The practice of Lent began well before most Christian denominations formed, and many Christians are returning to Lent for Easter preparation, just as they prepare their hearts for Christmas during Advent.

Some of you may be squirming in your chair, worried that Lent and intentions sound like their use contradicts grace. During the study, you will learn that Lent is intended to highlight grace and not works. Like any Christian discipline, God can use Lent as a powerful tool if practiced biblically. We will look at scriptural examples of fasting and self-examination to assure and guide us in our journey toward Easter.

What is the biblical reason to choose 40 days for Lent, or 46 when allowing for Sunday breaks?

The number, 40, is a significant number found many times in scripture. The following are only a few instances which tell of periods of 40 days or 40 years set aside for specific purposes. Identify the purposes in the following verses.

Genesis 7:4 *To cleanse the earth from evil, God sent 40 days of rain.*

Exodus 16:35 *For 40 years they traversed the desert where they depended on God and He purified His people from unbelief.*

Deuteronomy 9:9 *Moses fasted 40 days before receiving God's words on the tablets.*

Mark 1:12, 13

Jesus was tempted in the desert for 40 days before His ministry. Unlike the Israelites, He resisted temptation.

Acts 1:1-3 *After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples for 40 days before ascending again. He assured them and instructed them for what was to come.*

Is fasting a biblical practice?

The following verses give examples of fasting in the Old and New Testaments. Find the purposes for each fast in the passages.

Esther 4:16 *Esther called a corporate fast before entering the king's presence, presumably to prepare her and his reception of her.*

Nehemiah 4:1-6 1:4-11 (Note the reference correction.) *Nehemiah fasted and prayed on behalf of his countrymen, confessing sins and seeking success and compassion.*

Acts 9:1-9 *Saul fasted, presumably to make sense of his encounter with Jesus and to determine what to do about it.*

Luke 1:13-16 *John fasted from alcohol to "turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord, their God." (The fast enhanced his ministry.)*

Acts 13:1-4; Acts 14: 23 *Prophets and teachers fasted and prayed, "ministering to the Lord" (worship), to receive instruction and blessings on ministry.*

How do these verses apply to me?

The Bible gives many reasons for fasting. Below are four purposes for using a fast during this Lenten study. Do you recognize them in the verses in the two sections above?

1. Recognize, acknowledge, and repent of sin, especially unbelief
2. Commune with God and worship him
3. Receive God's wisdom and direction through scripture and prayer
4. Be Fruitful in ministry

Consider the list above. Which reasons describe specific needs in your life right now? For example, I wrestle with believing that God cares about me in particular. This thought is a sin of unbelief of his intimate love for me. Another example is that I want to commune, or to abide more in Christ throughout the day, instead of forgetting him in busyness.

You will recognize these four purposes for fasting and prayer throughout our Lenten study. The study will equip you with the ability to apply these purposes to your life more and more as the weeks progress.

Write other specific issues where you need God's help that may not be in the list.

Answers will vary. If the leader answers first with a sincere and heartfelt need, others will follow suit. If the first person answers with surface needs, or no one answers, others will follow suit.

What are the nuts and bolts of how we will keep Lent?

You will choose one intention to take up or give up. You have until Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, to decide which intention to choose. The intention will end on Easter.

In choosing an intention, keep in mind its purpose. An intention is not meant to change or create a habit, though it may. The main purpose is to grab your attention daily, or better yet, multiple times a day.

For instance, I have a sweet tooth. If I choose to give up sugar for Lent, I know that several times a day I will crave a cream cheese pastry or chocolate cake or ice cream. Each time thoughts of treats tempt me, I consider it a prompting to pray. We will talk about the prayers later, but the important thing to remember is to choose an intention that will prod you at least once daily.

Though you are free to choose whatever intention you wish, forms of food fasting seem to be most frequent in the Bible and most effective.

Food is a natural need, a primal need that speaks to us with more intensity than giving up something less necessary, such as a type of social media. (I can hear some of you disagreeing with me about the necessity of social media!) Food fasting affects us bodily, our stomach gurgles and our mouth waters.

In any case, choose something you will notice and is doable. You know yourself best, and what is doable for one person, may not be for another.

Keep in mind that Sundays are celebration days when we do not struggle to keep our intentions. Taking a break on Sundays reminds us that we cannot earn anything through our intentions. Jesus' work on the cross is already complete. The intention is merely a reminder tool to aid in changing us.

Here are a few suggestions to prime your intention ideas. More ideas are listed in the back of the devotional, if you have a copy.

Give Up

caffeine
alcohol
social media
tv sports
saying I, my, and me
complaining

Take Up

daily devotion
Bible memorization
listening
journaling

What ideas pop into your mind to take up or give up?

Answers will vary.

Narrow your choice to two or three intentions, then discuss them with the Lord.

Consider whom you might ask to be a prayer partner. You will pray for each other and check on each other during the study.

Lastly, meditate on these Scriptures until next week as you seek the Lord's guidance in choosing an intention and prayer partner.

Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalms 51:1-17

Mark 4:19

Matthew 6:16-18

II Chronicles 7:14

I am so excited for all that God will do in your life during this Lenten season. I am praying for you!

Chapter 2: Using Your Lenten Intention

Question of the Day

What super power would you choose if you could have one?

Answers will vary.

How NOT to use your intention

Our intention is a type of fast. Isaiah 58 gives us God's perspective on the wrong way and right way to fast.

We begin with how not to fast.

A child across the street from you is running toward the road after a ball. You hear a car and see an accident about to happen. How would you react?

"Stop! Freeze!" We would leap to the gutter while hollering and waving our arms.

In Isaiah 58:1, we see strong action words similar to the ones in the scenario above.

What is the timbre (tone, volume, emotion) of the words and phrases in verse 1?

Cry—urgent

loudly—strong emotion

trumpet—announce

don't hold back—with all you've got

What does that timbre tell you about the message?

This message is very important and must be heard immediately by everyone and taken seriously.

In verse 1, to what is he calling their attention?

He is waking them up to their ransgressions and sins.

Read Isaiah 58:2-3a. What positive actions do God's people *appear* to take?

They seek God daily and delight to know God's ways, as if they had not violated God and His ordinances.

(They felt good in the practices of outward religion, but their hearts were unchanged.)

In verse one, if God wants to point out his people's transgressions, then what should we think of their bragging in verses 2-3a?

Read Matthew 6:1-7 to help answer the question.

They sought God for appearances' sake. They wanted to be familiar with God's ways for knowledge not for love. In their pride, they did not recognize that they did not know God nor the deceitfulness of their own hearts.

Consider Isaiah 58:3b-5. What is God's response to their fasts?

God declares that, though they may fast, they treat others badly. Their fast is a sham for themselves and not for God, a temporary outward humility for self and others' deceptions that does no inward, lasting change.

Why do you think He responded in this manner?

They were unable or didn't want to see their hypocrisy, their deception, that they were not truly seeking God. They would not look at their hands and feet or in the mirror at their own behavior. They only roved their eyes over other people.

How do we describe people who represent themselves as doing all the right religious works, but their hearts are not sincerely seeking God's glory?

We call them hypocrites, two-faced, posers, and fakes.

What clues in verse 3-5 let you know that their humility and sorrow is not genuine?

They treat others with contempt. Their humility does not last nor bring about the genuine change which should affect their treatment and value of others.

Matthew 6:16-18

How do Jesus' instructions on fasting differ from the peoples' fast in Isaiah 58:5? *Jesus instructs them to fast in secret, not to seek validation, comfort or admiration from people, but to benefit others. Don't pray to be heard by men, pray to be heard by God. Don't act to be acknowledged by men but in reverence and love for God.*

A helpful way to recognize this in ourselves is to listen to our own prayers. Do we reference God in third person, as if we are not talking to Him? ("We thank you for the Word of God," or "Help us to tell others of the Gospel of God," instead of "We thank You for Your Word. Help us to tell others of Your Gospel.")

How to use your intention properly

Read Isaiah 58:5-7. In verse 5, what is the duration of their change in behavior? *Their fast lasted only one day, then they went back to old ways.*

When we turn to God in fasting, how long should we live with a changed heart? Not how long the fast goes on, but how long should the effects of drawing near to God remain in our lives? *The effects should be ongoing past the fast so that they become part of our character, not something we put on and take off again.*

What examples of a changed heart that result from fasting does God give in verses 6 and 7?

We should say "No" to wickedness in our lives and free others through the Gospel. We pull on work gloves to alleviate wrongs instead of complaining about them. We share our bounty with others in practical ways.

These examples result from a heart surrendered to God. They are not a checklist for an acceptable fast. The fast is a tool in God's hands to change our hearts. No matter what you chose for your intention, how should your behavior in all areas of your life reflect the changes in your heart? Think of your circle of contacts at home, work or errands, and give specific examples of how drawing near to God should affect these relationships. *Answers will vary. (I'll not see people as a means to an end. I'll ask the cashier about her day. I'll not snap at my family. I'll take a meal to the sick.)*

Consider Matthew 15:7-9.

The Pharisees question Jesus about the disciples' disregard for religious traditions. Lent may be considered a religious tradition.

From these verses, how can we avoid becoming hypocrites in our spiritual practices?

We seek God sincerely from the heart and not allow our fast to be an outward show. We dig deep and not skate on the surface of discussion and doctrine, but dive deeper and get wet into honest action.

Practical use of your intention

Each time your intention comes to mind, or you are tempted to not keep it, use the thought as a prompt to pray.

You may choose one or more of the following as a beginning guide in your Lenten prayers.

1. Admit your weakness to your heavenly father, and rejoice that you are already accepted and loved in Christ.
2. Pray to grasp Jesus' love for you and to love him more in return.
3. Thank him for pressing his grace to you daily.
4. Pray for other concerns you may have, including your reasons for fasting and prayer that you wrote last week.

Devotion of the Week from *Running to the Empty Tomb*

Day 1, Ash Wednesday

Philippians 3:1-11

Whatever pleasure we choose to forgo or discipline we choose to take up during Lent, that item is less than nothing compared to the greatness of knowing Jesus Christ.

Reminding ourselves of this truth will help us resist temptation, but if we do not succeed, His grace is greater than the keeping or not keeping of our intention.

Our intention should turn us to Christ, not compete with him.

Chapter 3: Being Known

Question of the Day

What is one of your habits?

Answers vary.

Beginning Exercise

Think of a man you know well.

Picture him at the end of the block, where you can make out only his outline. He walks away from you. Picture his gait, the way he swings his arms and his usual pace. See how his feet land, how straight or bent he carries himself, the angle he holds his head? Look how he turns his head, the swiftness or slowness with which he reacts. You can't see his face, but do you recognize him? (*We do, because we know him and his ways.*)

You and your best friend just began your walk in the neighborhood, and the conversation isn't rolling yet. Do you know what time she swung out of bed this morning? Do you know how long she sat at the breakfast table or if she chose honey over strawberry jam on her toast? Do you know what she said during the meal? What was she thinking when she closed her eyes last night? (*Humans can't know everything.*)

A Study of Psalm 139

Compare Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 139:23. These two verses are very similar, but what is different in these two verses?

The first verse declares that God already searched and knows David (us)—past tense, present knowing. Verse 23 invites God to search and know David (us).

Something happens in verses 2-22 that alters David's attitude toward God's knowledge of him. Let's figure out what occurs.

Read Psalm 139: 2. What does this verse tell that God knows about you? Think about the past hour. Picture specifically his knowledge of you during that short time.

Answers vary. (You knew I woke a minute before my alarm. You knew I walked 2 miles with a friend and that I joined in her plans and joy, though I wanted to confide my health struggle. You saw me sitting in a slant of sunlight, warming as I worked on this study. You knew I did it, thinking to earn your blessing instead of responding in love to your invitation to commune. Etc)

Read Psalm 139: 3. What does this verse tell that God knows about you? What does “all my ways” include?

Answers vary. (My paths to Publix, cleaners, Walgreens, Old Navy, Church, my blogging, music I listen to, my reading material, 7.5 hrs sleep, retreating from discomfort, my gestures, melancholy, schedule, lists, goals, fears. Etc)

Remember our beginning exercise, how the smallest movements, angles and curves identify a person? Stop to consider that God knows those details about you. He knows how you hold your pen, your gestures, your habits, your soapboxes and pleasures, what’s in your purse and on your keyring. He knows your taste in clothes, in food, and in friends.

Read Psalm 139:4. What does this verse tell that God knows about you?

Answers vary. (God knows my speech and pre-speech, or thought processes. He knows my negative words, my interruptions, forgotten vocabulary, my soft voice, my use of “wow,” and my questions. He knows my inflections and phraseology. Etc)

What do we call God’s attribute of knowing all things? (Hint, it begins with omni.)

Omniscience

What does God NOT know about David?

Nothing is outside of God’s knowledge.

What does God NOT know about you?

Nothing.

Read Psalm 139:6. In this verse, what is David’s reaction to God’s omniscience of his life?

David cannot grasp the extent of God’s knowledge, the extravagance, the completeness, the depth of his being known. David is laid bare before his Maker.

Read Psalm 139:7-8. The more David thinks about God's omniscience, his opinion about it changes. His reaction is like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:7-10. How did Adam, Eve and David react to God's knowledge of them? What emotions do you imagine they felt?
They tried to escape God. They ran away in fear, guilt, shame and dread and covered up. They tried to hide from God and His piercing sight of their actions and doubts of His goodness, and to hide their desire to oust His authority.

Read Psalm 139: 9-12. David continues to meditate on God's knowing him, and David's attitude changes yet again. Now how do you think he feels about God's omniscience?
Though God knows all, the pleasing and disgusting, God does not abandon me, but holds my hand, clasping shoulder, leading, guiding, assuring, correcting, according to His complete knowledge of me. David, feels the rush of relief, comfort, and peace as we do when we grasp the extent of God's absolute knowledge of and love for us.

Where can David run to escape God's presence?

Nowhere.

Where can you go that God is not with you?

Nowhere.

What do we call God's attribute of being everywhere? (Hint, it begins with omni.)

Omnipresence

Read Psalm 139:5-12. How do you feel about God's knowing everything about you? Are you awed and enchanted? Are you overwhelmed and afraid of your nakedness before him? Are you comforted that you will never be out of his sight no matter your circumstances?

Answers vary. (At first, I want to escape God's all-seeing eye, but in my inmost being, I wish to be found and am comforted that God cares enough to pursue me. His presence in every instance assures and comforts me, giving me security and stability. I am relieved at His knowledgeable leading. Etc)

Read Psalm 139:10-13. God is present continually with David. Even in the darkest places, God is omnipresent, and this comforts David. Verse 13 tells us why David has this change of heart and no longer fears. Why does verse 13 affect him positively? What does the verse tell us that God knows about David?

God knows everything about David and understands the way he ticks— the reasons for his choices. David realizes that as God's creation, he is well-loved and prized, just as we are.

Read Psalm 139:14. What is David's reaction to God's handiwork?
David is thankful and acknowledges that he is marvelously put together, because God crafted him.

Read Psalm 139:13-16. What is your reaction to God so carefully and intentionally knitting you together?

Answers vary.

(My flaws, which often are also my strengths, are intentional. My history with all its events is intentional, known, and understood from a higher perspective. God isn't one step behind, fixing things, He is ahead of me and has uniquely prepared my way and my end. Etc)

Read Psalm 139:16. Which attribute of God enables him to form life and determine its span? (Hint, this is another omni word.)

Omnipotence

What is outside of God's power in David's life?

Absolutely nothing.

What is outside of God's power in your life?

Absolutely nothing.

What areas in your life do you need to believe are not beyond God's power?

Answers vary.

(I must believe God can work in and through my spouse, children, health, vocation, finances, relationships, cowardice, negativity, self-centeredness. Etc)

Read Psalm 139:17-18. No matter how long David might meditate on God's works, he could never come to an end of the wonders he would find. What is David's reaction to God's omnipotence?

David is overcome with the magnitude of God's wonders and realizes the infinite nature of his God, who made him. This same God made each one of us.

Read Psalm 139:19-22. These verses may seem strange, but think of the transformation of David's attitude toward God since the beginning of this Psalm.

David began by stating the detailed and inescapable knowledge God has of him. As David thought about God's personal knowledge of him, God's dependable presence, God's brilliant crafting of him, and God's unlimited but loving power over him, David's reactions transform from fear and shame to awe and love.

How do you feel if someone criticizes or wants to harm someone who loves you and whom you love?

Answers vary. (Like a Mama Bear, I want to tear their head off! I want God's vengeance. I want God's protection for my beloved. I want God's justice and transformation for the inflicter of harm. Etc)

Would you want to keep company with someone who hates a person you love?

No. My natural reaction to such a person is revulsion, anger, and contempt.

Now explain David's reaction to evildoers in verses 19-22.

David sees himself on God's side and realizes that God's enemies have become his enemies, because David loves God.

Read Psalm 139:23-24. We each possess a heart, mind, and body.

Where in these verses does David ask God to search each of these three parts of him?

Search my heart—the soul

Know my thoughts—the mind

Examine my ways—the body

Now let's answer the question we posed at the beginning of this week's study. "What makes David change from 'O LORD, You have searched me and known me,' to 'Search me, O God, and know my heart?'" In verses 2-22, what steps of understanding alter David's attitude toward God's knowledge of him?

God is all knowing. He knows every facet of David's being, his inmost motives, thoughts, opinions, his every action.

God is everywhere. He is inescapably present inwardly and outwardly wherever David is.

God is all powerful. He is David's creator and loves His creature. Nothing can restrain Him from acting, with full knowledge and understanding, in David's life. David recognizes that God is for him, not against him.

Do you sense the love, the complete trust David expresses to God in these final verses?

Beloved, this is how we go about self-examination as David and the first disciples did. We do not approach a god who cannot wait to point out our flaws and punish us. We approach a Father who crafted and loves us, who desires to change us and to draw us near. We then experience relief and security from being fully known and wholly loved.

How do these verses apply to me?

Meditate on Psalm 139 and think of yourself, not David, when the text says, “me.”

Write the most meaningful verses on an index card and place them above your sink, in your car, or where you will see them often. Which verse(s) did you choose?

Answers vary.

It is enlightening to hear each person's choice and the reasons why those particular verses speak louder than the others.

Use your intention promptings to ask God to transform you to the place where you willingly ask verses 23 and 24 for yourself.

Devotions of the Week from *Running to the Empty Tomb*

Days 5, 6, and 7
Psalm 139

Chapter 4: Believing in Christ

Question of the Day

What helps you believe when you have times of doubt?

Answers vary.

Beginning Exercise

List the pebbles in your shoe, those issues that keep coming to mind and bothering you.

Answers vary.

Read Hebrews 10:32-34. What are the circumstances of the believers in this precursor to the author's essay on faith in the next chapter?

They were publicly mistreated and their property was seized. The persecution continued without justice.

Read Hebrews 11:1. In light of this setting, how is faith described in verse 1?

Faith is assurance of our hope for better things to come and conviction, a decision to believe, in the existence of something (or Someone) without the benefit of visual or experiential proof.

Why is it impossible to please God without faith (Verse 6)?

I cannot come to God or expect anything without believing He exists and that He is a good, kind and just God.

What are we to believe about God?

I am to believe that God exists, lives, is involved in my world and individual life, that He rewards me if I seek Him. He will reveal Himself to me and allow Himself to be found and all that goes with finding Him: peace, joy, love, suffering, hope, meaning, persecution.

Does it matter what we believe about God as long as we believe he exists?

Yes, it matters what we believe, because even the demons believe and shudder. (James 2:19) We must believe He is as He says He is in His Word, not our opinion of who we think or want Him to be.

Read I Corinthians 13:4-7. In verse 7, how is believing all things a demonstration of love?

Believing demonstrates trust, an affirmation of someone's character and goodness. Believing gives worth by affirming someone's integrity.

What do we communicate when we don't believe the best about people or don't believe what they say?

We communicate that they are not trustworthy or are undependable, have bad character, are liars stupid, or foolish.

How does this verse connecting love and belief shed light on why it is impossible to please God without faith?

When we don't believe God, we are saying He is untrustworthy or is unable to do what He says, that He is a liar.

Read Matthew 8:1-3. How did the leper express belief?

He expressed faith by saying that Jesus was capable of healing him. He knelt before Jesus, demonstrating his belief that Jesus was worthy of respect and deference, even worship.

How does Jesus respond?

Jesus reached out to the man, touched the man's disease, and stated His willingness to heal. Jesus healed the leper.

From these verses, what should be believed about Jesus?

My disgusting illness of sin doesn't repel Jesus, but He reaches toward me. Jesus is willing to heal, is able heal, and does heal.

Read Matthew 8:5-10a, 13. How does the centurion express belief?

He asks Jesus to heal his servant, and states that Jesus outranks him, though he is a commander of a 100 men plus servants. He believes in Jesus' authority to heal at a distance by speaking a command.

In what two ways found in verses 10 and 13 does Jesus respond?

*Jesus marveled at the man's faith.
He healed the servant from afar.*

What should be believed about Jesus from these verses?

*Jesus is powerful and authoritative.
He can perform feats from afar, unlimited by proximity.*

Read Matthew 8:23-27. How did the disciples express unbelief?

*They panicked and threw their faith overboard.
They questioned who Jesus was even after He calmed the storm.*

In what two ways found in verse 26 does Jesus respond?

*Jesus rebuked the men and the elements.
He asked the disciples why they were afraid, pointing out their unbelief in who he was and in his abilities.
He told them that their faith was puny.*

What should be believed about Jesus?

*Jesus is powerful and able to act, sovereign and aware of all.
Jesus is aware of our storms. He slept in the storm, trusting in the Father as we should trust in the Father's love and sovereignty.*

Read Matthew 13:54-58. How did people in Jesus' hometown and his family members express unbelief?

They wondered how he knew so much and could do astonishing things. They didn't acknowledge that He was special and from jGod. They saw Him only as one of them, equal to His half siblings. They did not accept His authority.

How does Jesus respond?

Jesus rebuked them for not acknowledging His being from God and for dishonoring Him in unbelief. He did no miracles, because miracles would not have accomplished anything, since the people refused to believe in what they had already seen and heard. Their unbelief did not limit Jesus' power. He chose not to perform miracles, because miracles would not change their hardened hearts.

Read Mark 16: 9-14. How did the disciples express unbelief?

They didn't believe Mary's reports or the report of the 2 who conversed with the risen Jesus. Maybe they didn't believe the changes Jesus wrought in Mary's life and dismissed her. They didn't believe Jesus had the power to overcome death. They did not believe His message.

How did Jesus respond?

He reproached them for their unbelief in who He was and in what He could do. They were proud in their own thoughts and not open to other possibilities that they could be wrong—twice wrong by the testimony of 3 witnesses. He rebuked them for their unkindness to the witnesses to His resurrection, for slandering them and dismissing them.

What should be believed about Jesus?

Jesus is able and does the impossible, like rising from the dead, conversing with people after rising from the dead, and changing peoples' character like Mary's.

How should we respond to other believers' stories of Jesus' work in their lives?

Believe that God is capable and at work in changing peoples' lives. We should give them the benefit of the doubt out of love.

Read Romans 1:16-23. What do all people have that demonstrates God's existence?

We all have a conscience from within, an innate knowledge that God exists, and creation which demonstrates God's existence and His character traits.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25. What can we do to strengthen our faith?
We can strengthen our faith by drawing near to God through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, which cleared the way. We can enter in faith, draw near, hold fast to belief and hope, believe is God is faithful to His promises. We can brainstorm ways to bolster and motivate each other to love actively. We meet together to encourage and spur on, to link together into oneness.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:2, 13. What is greater than faith and must accompany faith?
Love is greater than faith, hope, knowledge or prophecy. Without love, the others are powerless and empty.

How do these verses apply to me?

Remind yourself of what you should believe about Jesus and his father from the verses we studied.

Hebrews 11:1

God works even when I cannot perceive evidence of Him or His work.

Hebrew 11:6 and Days 9, 10, and 11 of *Running to the Empty Tomb*

God exists, and I will find Him if I seek Him. He may speak to me through different ways. Jesus lived on earth, died and rose again for me. God loves me and is sovereign over all things.

I Corinthians 13:7

Love believes the best of the beloved. To not believe is to withhold love or to diminish the beloved's character.

Matthew 8:1-3

Jesus is willing to touch my uncleanness and able to make me clean and whole.

Matthew 8:5-10a, 13

Jesus has authority and power to act and command obedience. No one is outside of His authority.

Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus is aware, even when it seems He is not. Situations that panic me are completely under His rule. He has complete power and authority.

Mark 16: 9-14

Even the most impossible feat is not beyond occurrence. Believe my brothers and sisters and believe God is untethered in my life.

Psalm 139 and Day 7 of *Running to the Empty Tomb*

God knows me completely and loves me wholly.

Which of these verses do you need to believe concerning each pebble in your shoe that you listed at the beginning of today's study?

Answers vary.

Devotions of the Week from *Running to the Empty Tomb*

Days 9, 10, and 11

Psalm 46:10, Hebrews 11:6

Chapter 5: Abiding in Christ

Question of the Day

Do you have a green thumb or a brown thumb? *Answers vary.*

The Vine, Vine Dresser, and Branches

Read John 15:1-6. In verse 1, who is Jesus?

Jesus is the true vine, the Head of the church.

In verse 1, who is Jesus' Father?

The Father is the vinedresser, the vintner who plants, tends and harvests His vineyard.

In verses 2 and 6, who are unbelievers?

Unbelievers are branches which do not bear fruit, that dry up and are merely suckers, a burden on the vine.

In verses 2 and 6, what does the Master Gardener do with branches that do not bear fruit?

He removes them, throws them away and eventually burns them up.

In verse 6, why don't they bear fruit?

They don't bear fruit, because they do not abide in the vine. They are not thoroughly grafted into Him.

In verses 2, 3, and 5, who are the believers?

Believers are those who bear fruit and are pruned, cleansed through God's word that has worked into and through them, and those that dwell in Jesus.

Who grafted the fruit-bearing branches into Jesus?

The vintner, God the Father, does the grafting.

In verse 2, what does the Father do for the believers and for what purpose?

The Father prunes the branches so that they bear more fruit. (He allows adversity in our lives to rid us of things that we cling to that are not good for us. He takes away aspects of our lives that are harmful to us, though the removal pains us.)

In verse 3, what cleansed the believers?

The Word Jesus spoke cleansed the believers. Jesus taught by mouth and example. He is the written Word in the flesh.

Are the branches that are thrown away cleansed? Why or why not?

They did not become one with the Word, which would have cleansed them. They did not abide in the Word and their lack of fruit reveals it.

What is necessary to our bearing fruit?

Abiding in Christ, the vine is necessary to bear fruit.

Abiding in Christ

In the following verses, what does it mean for us to abide in Jesus, and how do we do it?

John 15:7

Abiding in Jesus is immersing ourselves in God's Word and allowing it to flow into us, taking it in, exercising it in our actions, believing it and allowing Him to change us from the inside out.

John 6:56

We abide in Jesus through communion—Taking Him in so that He becomes a part of us, relying on His sacrifice to make us acceptable, feeding on Him by faith with thanksgiving, acknowledging our need for His sustaining life.

I John 2:24

To abide in Jesus, we cling to those things that we learned at first. We build on the basic things as a foundation for lessons learned and built later. These fundamentals are things such as Jesus loves us, is interested in the details of our lives, is God in the flesh, died and rose again, and communes with me in the Holy Spirit and in His word.

Read John 15:7, 16; I John 3:22

How can Jesus say that if we abide in Him, we can ask whatever we wish, and it will be done for us?

It follows that if we abide in Jesus, we will be in alignment with His will and keep His commandments, living lives pleasing to Him.

Abiding comes first—>our wills unify with His—>we will ask according to His will.

Christ Abiding in Us

In the following verses, what does it mean for Jesus (the Word) to abide in us? How does He abide in us?

John 15:7

He abides in us through our listening, holding and obeying His word. He is the word, so if the word abides in us, Jesus abides in us.

I John 3:24

If God's word abides in us, we will obey, which is a sign that He lives in us through His spirit.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word, Jesus' words, abide in us by teaching and admonishing each other through songs and hymns, singing with thankfulness from the heart.

Bearing Fruit

Read John 15:8. What glorifies Jesus' Father?

We glorify the Father when we bear evidence that we belong to Him, namely fruit, (The fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.)

What proves that we are Jesus disciples?

The evidence of changed lives with fruitful behavior proves we are disciples.

Read John 15:16. What is God's part and what is our part in bearing lasting fruit?

God chose us to bear fruit and appointed us to His works. Our part is to ask God to work through us for lasting fruit and then abide in Him to do it.

Analyze John 15:9. What is the path of love in this verse?

God loves the Son—>The Son loves us—>We are to love (which is the fruit of abiding in Jesus and His love for us)

Consider John 15:10. What did it look like for Jesus to abide in His Father's love?

Jesus was in alignment with the Father's will, obeying the Father's will, which is abiding with the Father.

In John 15:9-10, how do we abide in Jesus' love?

We abide in Jesus by remaining connected to Him in His word and in communion. We lined up with His thoughts and plans and make decisions that accord with His will, thus we abide in Jesus' love. Checking with Him in decisions, as we do with a spouse, is an expression of love that we want what the other wants, that we are unified in decisions and direction.

From Ephesians 3:17-19, what do abiding in Jesus and His abiding in us bring us?

Abiding in Jesus and He in us brings comprehension of the magnitude of His love for us and grounding in it, so we are filled with God's fullness and power working in us.

Read I John 4:7-21. What is the order of love's progression in verses 7-11?

God loved us->sent His Son->now we love

God's love must come first, the basis, expressed in Jesus' coming, and our response is love for God and for those who bear His image.

In I John 4:12, 13, 15, 16, what three things assure us that God abides in us?

We are assured that God abides in us (1)when we love others, (2) by His Spirit assuring, speaking, and working through us, and (3) by our beliefs that Jesus is the Son of God, and that Father and Son are unified.

In I John 4:12, 17-19, how is God's love perfected in us?

God abides in us, causing us to love one another, which brings love full circle and is perfected.

Read I John 3:16-21. What does a guilty conscience indicate?

A guilty conscience doesn't indicate anything true if God's love bears practical love through us, but if we aren't bearing fruit, our conscience informs us that God's love is not abiding in us, and we need to 'go home.'

Read I John 3:23-24. What are two commandments in these verses?

*Believe in the name of Jesus (who He is).
Love one another.*

How do we know we abide in Him from these two verses?

If we're abiding in Him, (1) His love will prompt us to love others and keep His commands, and (2) the Spirit will confirm it. He dwells in us, nudging us to good works and remind us of God's love for us.

Based on the verses in John and I John, what does fruit look like?

Fruit looks like a life in tune with the Holy Spirit. We are confident in God's love for us so we, in turn, love others and live life aligned with God's will. We will want what God wants.

Galatians 5:22-23

List the fruit of the Spirit given in these verses.

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control

Which of these fruit can *only* be exercised in *relation to other people*?

patience, kindness, gentleness, love, faithfulness

Read I Corinthians 13 4-7 and list what love IS.

patient, kind, rejoices in truth, believes all things, bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things, is unfailing

List what love is NOT.

Love is not jealous, not braggadocious, not arrogant, not rude, not self-seeking, doesn't insist on my way, is not testy or irritable, does not keep records of wrongs, is not resentful, and does not rejoice in unrighteousness or wrongdoing.

How do these verses apply to me?

Think about your most important relationships. How are you doing in “loving Jesus by loving them?”

Answers vary.

First, God loves His Son and us, then we return the Father's and the Son's love, and finally we love other people. Where do you get tripped on this chain of events?

Answers vary.

What needs to change?

Answers vary.

Return to John 15:11. What will loving God and others bring you?
joy

Think of a time this happened in your life.

Answers vary.

We cannot live up to our Lenten intentions without abiding in Christ. He is our source of power, love and motivation. Sometimes we will still fail in abiding, but that's why we need Easter!

Devotions of the Week from *Running to the Empty Tomb*

Days 14, 15, and 16

John 15

Chapter 6: Resting in Christ

Question of the Day

How do you relax?

Answers vary.

Finding Rest as a Child

Read Matthew 11:20-30, then answer the following questions.
What is Jesus dealing with in verses 20-24, prior to the section 25-30?

He is coming from unrepentant, unbelieving cities where He gave proof of His identity, yet they would not believe. They thought they knew better, and would not relinquish their pride.

What is Jesus' reaction in verses 25 to the unbelief He sees in verses 20-24?

He praises God that He did not reveal Himself to the arrogant, to those satisfied with their own understanding, or to scoffers of Jesus and His miracles. He praised God for revealing Himself to the simple, to those who admit their dependence and ignorance. He condemns (v20-24) their unbelief, unrepentant and proud hearts.

What titles does Jesus give to God in verse 25?

Jesus calls God, Father. He is our origin, from whose seed we were created in His image. Jesus calls God Lord of Heaven and Earth. Nothing lies outside of His rule in known and unknown existence, whether in our world or beyond Earth or the Heavens.

How do these titles for God affect Jesus' and our prayers?

These titles give authority, by naming God's power and reach. They give us confidence, assurance and relief that there is nowhere higher we can take our complaints.

For what does He thank His Heavenly Father, and why is that significant?

Jesus thanks God that there are no requirements for special understanding, knowledge, importance, or religious backgrounds (Jews) to be chosen of God. God's choice is the basis for His revelation.

Think for a moment, do you view yourself as wise and understanding or as a child in God's eyes?

Answers vary.

Why would it be best to be a child?

A child simply trusts and believes the impossible. A child can believe that God loves the unlovely, the simple, not the best and brightest, that God exists, that He rose from the dead, that He performs miracles, and that He is a forever friend.

In Matthew 11, verses 26 and 27, who wants you to understand the Gospel?

Both God the Father and God the Son want me to understand the Gospel.

How do we see the perfect unity between Father and Son in verse 27?

They are unified in their desires and pleased with each other. They know each other completely and share all power and authority equally.

Why is it significant for us that the Father and the Son are unified?

We are chosen out of the will and pleasure of them both. All power and authority is behind our privilege granted to know them. They both want us to know them as they know each other.

Finding rest under Jesus' yoke

Read Matthew 11:27-30 to answer the following questions.

What is the significance of the Father handing all things over to Jesus and that Jesus knows the Father?

Jesus has authority and resources to carry out His promises, which are in complete agreement with the Father's will.

When Jesus says, “Come to me,” what does that communicate to you? Is his voice gentle or commanding? How do you know?

He wants me to come to Him. I know because He commands it with gentleness and humility.

From verse 29, what wearies and burdens those who come to Jesus?

Our inability or constant failings to “live up to” being a Christian wearies us.

How has your Lenten intention affected your perception of your burden of sin?

Answers vary.

(I am reminded how often I desire worthless things, elevating them to idolatry. Lent reveals how easily I can slide into justifying something to have my way. I am also more aware and blown away by His never-ending love and kind acceptance of me shown in His redemptive work on the cross.)

What does Jesus give to us when we go to him, and what does that look like practically?

He gives rest for our souls. He gives rest from fear and anxiety by simplifying my spiritual walk to coming to Him and taking His yoke.

After the command to “come,” how do you understand the next action we are to take in verse 29?

Take my yoke is to follow Jesus’ leading. I hold nothing back nor flee from Him. I carry what He gives me to carry, nothing more, nothing less, and together we accomplish as He directs.

What is the third action we are to take, and how do we practically do that?

We are to learn from Jesus. We learn through Scriptures, praying with listening, seeking His instruction with acceptance and obedience, and through the teaching and preaching of others.

How does knowing Jesus is gentle and humble affect your accepting His yoke and learning from Him?

He will not demand or ask what I cannot do. He will help me and stay with me.

How can His yoke be easy and His burden be light?

His yoke is easy and burden light, because He loves me. I love Him in return, so it is a joy to work with Him, to serve Him and be with Him. He already did the heavy lifting before me.

How do these verses apply to me?

Think of a time you came to the end of your rope and gave up your struggle to God's hands. You completely let go of any sense of control you thought you had and replaced a yoke of your making with His yoke. Write about what happened to your soul during that time, or write about a burden you need to relinquish to him now.

Answers vary.

Rest in Jesus during Lent. Look to Him for direction. Your intention can remind you that your burden is light and easy, and if it isn't, will drive you back to Him.

Devotions of the Week from *Running to the Empty Tomb*

Days 18, 20, and 21

Matthew 11:28-30, Isaiah 40:31

Chapter 7: Confessing Corporately

Question of the Day

Think of the human body. Which body part represents you?

Answers vary. (head, ear, hand, foot, mouth, back, etc)

My Journey to Corporate Confession

I wrote this study during Lent. As Lent progressed, my prayers prompted by my intention progressed.

I began by affirming that God was more important than the item I gave up, and I asked Him to help me seek satisfaction only in Him. I prayed for forgiveness for renegeing on my intention and thanked Him for His repeated, unfailing forgiveness.

After days of these prayers, the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to how constantly my intention bubbled up in my thoughts and how often I failed at keeping my resolve. I saw the extent of my need for Jesus' resurrection and was humbled to realize that I was not the person I thought I was.

As a result, my compassion increased for others in their failures. I understood that they struggled as I did. During church confession, instead of concentrating solely on my shortcomings, I began praying for my brothers and sisters too. As I rejoiced in my forgiveness and acceptance, I gave thanks for their forgiveness and acceptance too.

Mourning for the mistakes of others in the body of Christ changed my perspective on the church. I began thinking more of the body as a whole and myself as a member.

I realized that the church's wrongs are my wrongs, because I am a part of the church. Instead of thinking only of us confessing individually at the same time, I began confessing the sins of the body of which I am a part.

We think of ourselves with individual liberties and rights and forget that we live in community with other individuals. Each of us is responsible for exercising our ministries for the good of the whole. We are also responsible for our failings and their effects on the whole. We too are affected by the ministries and failings of the rest of the body.

Our independence colors our worldview. The thought of being one cog in a machine offends us, as if that devalues us. That thinking is wrong.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, together form the Trinity. The Persons of the Trinity are each part of the Godhead and perfectly unified, yet distinct in person. The Trinity is the epitome of what we should be, of one mind, working together in harmony for one purpose, yet individually equipped and necessary to the whole.

A few months after my “aha” thoughts about corporate confession, our pastor referred to the experience of a church in Alabama. First Presbyterian Church in Montgomery had been a large, thriving church of 1,119 members in 1959, but then it fell into a steep decline. No matter the programs implemented, membership steadily dropped until only 112 members were listed in 2014.

The church leadership dug into their past and found a remarkable correlation between the church’s sickness and a declaration they had made in 1956 stating, “No member of the Negro race (will) be received as a member of our Church or seated in the sanctuary for regular worship.”

As a body, the church sins against God in similar ways that we as individuals do. We form cliques, criticize, and collectively ignore people that are not like us or that seem messy. As a church, we tolerate wrongdoing instead of humbly and gently confronting our members. As a church, we fail to meet the needs of our members, and those members wither and die or become useless. These are individual’s sins but also corporate sins.

What do we do as individuals when we sin? We admit them and turn from them. What should we do as a body of believers? We should admit our corporate sins and turn away from them. Is this a new thought for you like it was for me?

When I began searching the Scriptures and theological literature, I discovered that others have recently landed on the same thoughts. God is speaking to His church, reminding us of what other cultures already recognize. We are not independent Christians. We are part of Christ's body.

Consider the Old Testament and of how God spoke to, cared for, disciplined, and wooed the nation of Israel. He made a covenant with Abraham, yet this covenant is for all believers, the entire body of Christ. Adam elevated himself to the place of God, yet we all live with the consequences.

Summarize the theme in each of these New Testament verses.

I Corinthians 12 (the whole chapter)

These gifts of the Spirit represent different parts to the body. Each part is necessary and needs the other parts. We are connected and affect each other. We shouldn't expect other members to think or be like us. We are diverse by design.

Romans 12:1-8

We are to submit our gifts to the good of the body and to God's glory. We recognize that as gifts, they are nothing to brag or feel less about, but each are necessary and given for us to use for the body under God's direction.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 25; 5:22-32

We are to preserve the unity of the body, because we all belong to each other and should treat each other with respect. We are one.

Colossians 3:15

Let Christ's peace rule and be thankful for each other, because we are called to be unified.

1 Timothy 2:1-8

We should make requests, prayers, and thanks for all members to preserve peace.

In James 5:13-20, the author talks about prayer and refers to an event in I Kings, chapters 17 and 18. Israel and Ahab sinned against God by serving false gods, so Elijah prayed that it would not rain for 3 years. His prayer addressed the idolatry of his nation in worshipping Baal. Elijah worshipped the Lord, as did 400 others who did not bend the knee to Baal, but all suffered the drought.

Look closely at James 5:14-16, 19-20. Notice all the commands to members to interact with the body of Christ.

What instructions are the different members given in the following verses?

Verse 14 (James 5:14)

We are instructed to ask elders to pray for us. Elders are to pray over us and anoint us for healing.

Verse 16

We are to confess our sin to others and pray for each other.

Inferred in verses 19-20

We are to turn back sinners by confronting and correcting them. (Galatians 6:1 instructs us to do so gently and humbly.)

What can result, both physically and spiritually, from the elders' prayers?

Restoration, healing, conversion, forgiveness can result from prayers.

James says to confess to each other and to pray for each other, not only for ourselves, but to rescue others from error.

Consider Daniel. Read the following verses and describe what you discover about Daniel's character.

Daniel 1:1-4, 8

Daniel is attractive, intelligent, wise, understanding, discerning, knowledgeable, able to serve the powerful, and without defect

Daniel 1:17-20

Daniel is knowledgeable in literature (man's knowledge) and wise and understanding (God's knowledge).

Daniel 2:27-30

Daniel is humble and has a strong faith and knowledge of and respect for God.

Daniel 2:48-49

Daniel is humble, loyal, and has a proper perspective of himself, his friends, his faith and his situation. He is able to rule.

Daniel 6:3-5

Daniel has an extra ordinary spirit, prudent, virtuous, honest, able in mind and body during silver years, faithful, hardworking.

Read Daniel 9:2-3

What distressed Daniel?

Daniel was distressed about his and Judah's sins and punishment. He prayed in humble fasting and supplication about Jerusalem and her punishment for their sins against God.

How did he find out about it?

Daniel discovered his and his countrymen's sins by reading the histories in the Scriptures.

Read Daniel 9:4-15. What does Daniel declare to God in these verses?

Daniel declares that God is Lord, great, awesome, faithful, loving, and righteous. Daniel also declares that he and Judah are sinful, wicked, rebellious, faithless, disobedient, and don't listen.

In Daniel 9:20, to whose sin does he refer?

Daniel refers to his own sin and the sins of his people.

How does Daniel describe God in Daniel 9:9, 14?

Daniel declares that God is compassionate, forgiving and righteous.

Read Daniel 9:17-19. What does he ask of God?

Daniel asks God to listen to his confessions, to shine His face on their plight, to see their desolations, to be compassionate, to hear, to act, to forgive, and to preserve them for God's sake and name.

What is Daniel's attitude in approaching God?

Daniel is humble, contrite, respectful and aware of his and his nation's sin.

For further reading on the subject of corporate confession:

<http://byfaithonline.com/the-confession-of-corporate-sins/>

<http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/life/2017/04/15/first-presbyterian-church-seeks-healing-redemption-sins-committed-during-civil-rights-era/100324038/>

How do these verses apply to me?

Consider yourself as a necessary member of the body and the body as essential to your spiritual health. What thoughts and attitudes about the church do you need to adjust?

Answers vary.

Write a prayer in which you discuss with God your part of the body and the body's connection to you. Be honest with Him, who knows your thoughts, and include corporate confession which the Holy Spirit brings to mind.

Answers vary.

Lent is a time of examination for self and the body of Christ.

Devotions of the Week from *Running to the Empty Tomb*

Days 23, 24, 25, and 26 concentrate on your relationship with God. Consider how His placing you in a church family further surrounds and supports you in your spiritual walk.

Romans 8:28, Psalm 46:1, Galatians 4:6, Luke 15:31

Chapter 8: Enduring for Joy

Question of the Day

What was the happiest day of your life? *Answers vary.*

What is set before us?

This is the last week before Easter and the last week of our intention. Don't give up. The finish line is in sight. Let's remind ourselves of the goal and reasons to persevere to reach it.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3 to answer the following questions.

What is the "therefore" in verse 1 there for? Skim the previous chapter to provide the answer, and use the clue, "so great a cloud of witnesses," to help answer.

Therefore refers to the many who have gone before us, each contributing to bring us to the time and place where we occupy, God's plan to this point. They witness what we will do with the baton they pass to us. They didn't have the benefit of the New Testament, but we do. We still, like our predecessors, must press on, not complete in knowledge and understanding, but acting in faith.

What worries, what ball and chains, drag your spiritual race?

Answers vary.

(I fear that I'm not doing enough— don't love others enough, care for the homeless enough, empathize with mothers or the poor or people suffering enough. I fear that I am walking down the wrong paths or that I delude myself thinking that I'm making a difference.)

What temptations wrap around you, entangling, tripping, and constricting you in your spiritual race?

Answers vary.

(selfishness, comfort, possessions, people, approval, pride, glory, appearance, accomplishments)

What are the charges given to us in verse 1?

We are to lay aside encumbrances and sin and to run in our lanes with endurance. (Run, not stroll or walk carelessly, but confidently with effort and zeal)

What is the race set before us?

The race is whatever Jesus sets before us, loving Him and people, striving to become like Him in character.

What is the charge given us in verse 2?

We are to focus on Jesus, the goal of our race, not the hurdles between us.

Who set you on this path?

Jesus is the author who has written my story. He wrote me and my part into His over-arching story.

Who formed the path?

Jesus, the author, determines the twists and characters, the rise and fall, and the ultimate end of the path.

Who will enable you to hike the hills and descents to the final destination?

Jesus, who possesses power enough to rise from the dead, the same who raises me now and at the end of my time on this old earth.

What kind of relationship does Jesus desire with us?

Read the following verses and describe the relationship we have with God.

Ephesians 5:28-32

God is our spouse who loves, cherishes and nourishes us. He holds nothing back from His care of us, including His life.

John 3: 28, 29

Christ is our bridegroom. We are Jesus' bride, His betrothed.

Matthew 9:14, 15

Jesus is our bridegroom.

II Corinthians 11:2

Jesus is our betrothed, our fiancé.

How is our understanding of John 15: 9-11 enriched, considering the relationship Jesus wants with us?

Answers vary. (He wants us to be unified, and His way is the best way so that is why He we are to obey Him. He obeys the Father, because He loves the Father and wants to be one with Him. I want to be one with Jesus, because I love Him. This is reciprocated love and results in completed joy.)

Ponder a perfect bridegroom/bride relationship. Think of your unspoiled moments of intense falling in love. Think of fairytale dreams of love in the iterations of "Cinderella" found in cultures around the world from ancient times to present. How is the fantasy of Cinderella a reality for us in Jesus?

Answers vary. (Jesus is my perfect Prince, the most noble and beautiful and kind. I can trust Him completely and rely upon Him. He is worthy of my whole devotion. He loves, me, so I should respond in love to Him.

Do you think we can have this kind of relationship on earth or must we wait until we reach Heaven?

Answers vary. (Marriage is a symbol of this relationship, though neither partner is yet perfected. We can have this relationship with Jesus now though, in some ways, as a long distance relationship. We are promised to Him and must remain faithful and prepare with joy for our future wedding.)

Jesus' Endurance

Read Hebrews 12:2-4. What was the joy that was set before Jesus?

The joy set before Jesus was the joy of finishing His course to pay for His bride, then to join His Father in Heaven until we also join them.

Read Hebrews 12:5-6. Besides joy, why did Jesus endure the cross?

Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him and in obedience to God, the Father's will.

In Hebrews 12:18-24, for what did Jesus save us?

Jesus saved us for a beautiful city filled with heavenly beings and others like us, perfected, a place of belonging and wholeness.

What did Jesus endure in His last week, both as a man like us, and as God like His Father?

Use the Scriptures you've read this week in *Running to the Empty Tomb* to expand the Hebrews passage, or read of Jesus' last week in the following Gospel chapters.

Matthew 26-28, Mark 14-16, Luke 22-24, John 13-21

Jesus endured man's fickleness, betrayal, belief and unbelief, brotherly companionship and loneliness, anxiety, uncertainty, hatred, injustice, and victory in Lazarus' resurrection.

Hebrews 12:4 describes most of us in the United States but not worldwide. Name some people in current times who have suffered this depth of hostility.

Answers vary.

(Egyptians slaughtered in churches and buses, Syrians trapped in their basements, Chinese Christians imprisoned and churches burned, people in U.S. churches gunned down, etc.)

Is it possible that we also could suffer in this way?

Yes, it is possible more as each day passes and hostility towards Christians increases. Jesus told us to expect persecution. (John 15:18-21)

How do these verses apply to me?

How will you respond to the encouraging verses of Hebrews 12:1-3?

I will fix my gaze on Jesus and keep going. I pray I will be faithful with what I have been given and endure like those who have gone before me. I pray I will despise shame for the joy that will take its place with Jesus, my example, my hero, my bridegroom, my advocate and humble king.

From Revelation 19: 6-9, why should you strive to persevere in the race?

I will be blessed, clothed in righteousness, celebrate at the marriage feast with my bridegroom. I may not know exactly what this will look like, but it will be joyous.

This is it, the last week of Lent. You have persevered and your intention's job is almost over.

Remember from Psalm 139 how much God loves you. **Put aside your expectations for Easter and trust him to reveal what he knows you need.**

Easter, as well as Communion throughout the year, are foretastes of the Wedding Feast we will enjoy with our Heavenly Fiancé. Let's put on our white dresses!

Devotions of the Week from *Running to the Empty Tomb*

Days 29 and 36

Zechariah 9:9, Romans 8:31-39

Chapter 9: Sharing Our Easter Stories

This week's study is like a collection of Questions of the Day.

Don't skip this week.

Hearing each other's Easter stories will be the highlight of the study, and if you completed the study on your own, these questions will help you keep Easter alive in your spiritual walk.

Take the time to think through and write down your answers.

How did trying to keep your intention affect you?

Answers vary. If doing the study with a group, the leadership should answer first with a heart-felt answer, which will embolden other participants to answer likewise. The deeper the sharing, the deeper the encouragement all will receive.

How did the study work through your mind, spirit and body?

Answers vary.

(I hadn't thought about corporate sin before. Now I'm more patient with other people and pray for them as I do myself. I have been keeping my faith personal, but now I realize that I have responsibilities to the body of believers and they to me. My body showed me how much I prefer myself over God but also revealed to me His ever-present love and forgiveness and joy. Etc.)

What surprised you in your preparation for Easter?

Answers vary.

(I didn't realize how often I am tempted and choose to do what I want justified with excuses. I didn't realize the depth of God's knowledge of me and of His love and pleasure in me. Etc.)

Has your perspective on Jesus' death become sharper or changed in any way through the study? If so, how?

Answers vary.

(I see my need of His saving grace more often now and so I appreciate it more. I realize more the extent of His love, so my love and joy in Him has grown. Etc.)

What ideas through Lent were new to you or were expanded for you?

Answers vary.

(I learned more about fasting, self-examination, God's knowledge of me and involvement in my life, corporate confession, etc.)

Were you disappointed in the outcome of your preparation?
If so, in what way(s), and why do you think it didn't meet your hopes?

Answers vary.

Was Easter richer for you this year? Explain.

Answers vary.

Jesus Continues to Live

Remember back to what we learned in Isaiah 58:5-7 during the second lesson about fasting? A proper fast should last a lifetime. Our intention is over, though you may choose to continue it, but our lives or thinking should be permanently changed from the "fast."

Jesus rose on the third day. How will you continue with what the Holy Spirit taught you during Lent into the fourth, fifth, and rest of your days?

Some ideas are listed on the next page to help you retain the things that were embedded into your spiritual life. Choose at least one of them to do.

- Meet weekly or text/email weekly with a friend. Ask each other a brief set of questions such as,
 - Give an instance this week when the resurrection was real to you.
 - When did you recognize the resurrection in someone else's life or share your joy in the resurrection with someone else this week?
 - When did you abide closest to Jesus this week?
 - When did you separate yourself from Jesus this week?
 - In what did you struggle this week?
 - Which scripture was most meaningful to you this week?
 - How can we pray for each other this week?
- Continue using any nagging thought as a tool to pray. Praying will enable you to abide in Christ.
- Review verses that you chose to memorize in the study. Reviewing will help you remember the Bible study lessons.
- When confronted by a failure, don't beat yourself up, but rejoice that it has been redeemed in full by the empty tomb.

List your ideas for holding on to the things you have grown in during the study. Star the ones that seem doable and would be most effective in your life.

Answers vary.

I have been praying for you and would love to hear your stories. Stop by my website to connect and see my other projects. You may enjoy reading and subscribing to my blog.

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