

Look in the MIRROR

STUDY GUIDE

WEEK ONE – FEBRUARY 26

NATHANAEL—OVERCOMING OUR BIASES

Look in the
MIRROR

Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you come to study. Pray:
“What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

Opening question:

“How have you followed the Spirit’s lead this past week?”

Context and Background: Nathanael (whose name means “God has given” in Hebrew) was one of the disciples called by Jesus (John 1:43). He was from Cana in Galilee (John 21:2) and was brought to Jesus by his friend, Philip, who also became one of Jesus’ disciples. While Nathanael was one of the first to express belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 1:49), he almost missed out as he initially allowed his doubt (based on his bias of location) to get in the way. When Philip told Nathanael he found the One who Moses and the prophets had written about and that this One was from Nazareth, Nathanael proclaimed, “Can anything good come from there?” Sometimes we miss out on all Jesus offers us because allow our biases, questions, and objections to get in the way.

READ: John 1:43-51

As we look at, consider, and get in touch with this passage of scripture, we find there are several things we need to understand:

JESUS CALLS US TO FOLLOW HIM (John 1:43, 44)

Just prior to calling Philip, Jesus calls Andrew and his brother Peter to follow Him. Note that they didn’t need to know completely what it meant to follow Jesus. They didn’t need to know and understand the scriptures. They didn’t have to be perfect. All that was required was they were willing to follow Jesus. As we consider what it means to follow Jesus, we find it means we’re to follow Him closely—to walk with Him, talk to Him, listen to Him, learn from Him, and become like Him. We’re called to consider our willingness to follow Jesus as a disciple.

JESUS WANTS US TO INVITE OTHERS (John 1:45)

After hearing Jesus’ call, Philip went and found his friend, Nathanael, and told him he’d found the One who’d been promised by Moses and the prophets—the Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth—the Son of Joseph. Philip was so thrilled to have found Jesus, he immediately went and invited his friend to join him in following Jesus. Consider when was the last time you invited someone to follow Jesus. If we’re to be His disciples, then this is part of the call.

WE ALL HAVE BIASES AND OBJECTIONS (John 1:46)

Nathanael's skepticism almost kept him from both meeting Jesus and following Him. Sometimes, if we're not careful, our biases can keep us from seeing Jesus. Biases about race, gender, class, job, appearance, and a host of other things cause us to dismiss places and people with whom we might encounter Jesus. Consider what biases have kept you from seeing Jesus and following Him.

JESUS OVERCOMES OUR OBJECTIONS AND ACCEPTS US (John 1:47, 48)

Jesus refers to Nathanael as "an Israelite in whom there is no deceit" which triggered amazement in Nathanael as he realizes Jesus knows everything about him—his thoughts as well as his questions—even before he meets Him. Jesus sees Nathanael's honesty as a strength and isn't threatened by his biases or objections. We need to wrestle with the questions that become stumbling blocks for us when it comes to Jesus and our following Him. Jesus would rather have an honest confession than a false profession.

JESUS REVEALS WHAT WE NEED IN ORDER TO BELIEVE (John 1:49)

Nathanael accepted Jesus' description of his character as true and wondered how Jesus knew this about him—having never met him before. When Jesus explained, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you," it was enough to convince Nathanael that Jesus was the Christ, calling Him the "Son of God" and the "king of Israel." We find here that when we ask our questions—when we confess our objections—when we honestly seek and are open to Jesus—He'll give us all we need to recognize and profess Him. For Nathanael, it was the fact that Jesus knew him. His honesty and integrity revealed his questions and biases, and Jesus could deal with that. We're called to realize just how much Jesus loves us—no matter what we've done, no matter our sins, no matter our biases—He really truly loves us.

JESUS REMINDS US THE BEST IS YET TO COME (John 1:50, 51)

Jesus responded to Nathanael's statement of faith with a prophecy: "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that" (John 1:50). Then Jesus prophesied that Nathanael would see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man (John 1:51). This is a reference to the story of Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28. But instead of ascending and descending on a ladder as they did in Jacob's dream, the angels would ascend and descend on the Son of Man—meaning Jesus Himself will be the final, efficacious connection between God and humanity (see Hebrews 9:12; 10:10). Jesus and Nathanael were just getting started. He would walk with Jesus for three years and spend a lifetime following Him. Like all the original disciples (except John), Nathanael would eventually be martyred for this faith—and on that day, his faith would become sight. Nathanael's story reminds us—when we follow Jesus, the best is yet to come.

The bottom line is the very real fact that none of this would have happened if Nathanael hadn't overcome his biases, questions, and objections to meet Jesus in the first place. The turning point for Nathanael came when he was willing to look in the mirror and look at himself—and in so doing, to risk facing his biases to meet Jesus.

Questions for reflection and action as we look in the mirror:

- Have you ever missed what Jesus has to offer you because you stopped before ever getting started?
- What are some of the obstacles that tend to prevent you from following Jesus?
- What biases have kept you from seeing Jesus and His call on your life?
- Do your religion/religious words keep you from seeing who Jesus is—or help you to see who Jesus is?
- What does it mean to you to be known for honesty and integrity?
- Do you believe Jesus sees you, good and bad, and loves you?
- Do you believe Jesus wants you to follow Him as a disciple?
- What do you see as the Holy Spirit holds up the mirror?
- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you concerning following Jesus as His disciple?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- Who do you need to tell?
- How can the group help?

WEEK TWO – MARCH 5

HEROD ANTIPAS—SILENCING THE MESSENGER

Look in the MIRROR

Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you come to study. Pray:

“What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

Opening question:

“How have you followed the Spirit’s lead this past week?”

Context and Background: Herod Antipas wasn’t the first choice to be ruler or king of any kind. But he does represent a damaged family cycle and a selfish desire of power that, when unchecked, destroys faith, people, places, and hope. Herod Antipas refused to look in the mirror—even when it was forced upon him. In fact, he would rather have the mirror and the person holding the mirror killed and destroyed before having to look into it and see himself. Herod Antipas, ruled on Rome’s behalf over Galilee and Perea for a total of 43 years, and there came a time when John the Baptist forced him to look in the mirror at himself. But rather than look and hear the warnings, Herod would have John the Baptist killed.

Herod Antipas is a part of the account leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus. When Jesus was finally arrested, He was brought before Pilate—the governor or prefect of Judea. Pilate tried to escape responsibility for dealing with Jesus, and he thought he had found his way out when he heard that Jesus was from Galilee: he could shift the responsibility to Herod Antipas. So, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who happened to be in Jerusalem for the Passover at the time (Luke 23:6, 7).

Herod Antipas was excited to see Jesus in person. He tried to get Jesus to perform some miracles for him, and he asked Him many questions. Jesus refused to answer, probably because He knew Herod Antipas was not sincerely seeking truth. Of course, Jesus also refused to perform any miracles. Herod allowed his soldiers to ridicule and beat Jesus and then sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 23:8–11). That day, Herod and Pilate became friends, whereas before they had been at odds (Luke 23:12). Although Herod Antipas is mentioned in Acts as being partially responsible for the crucifixion, we gain no new information about him.

READ: Matthew 14:1-14

As we look at, consider, and get in touch with this passage of scripture, we see that sometimes we miss the repentance and life change to which God is calling us because we refuse to listen to the messenger God sends—and we choose not to listen because we don’t like that they cause us to look in the mirror at ourselves:

HEROD HEARD ABOUT JESUS (Matthew 14:1, 2)

Herod certainly knew about Jesus. As Jesus' ministry became well known, Herod began to fear John the Baptist (whom he had previously executed) had risen from the dead. Throughout Jesus' ministry, some of the Jewish rulers plotted with the Herodians (supporters of Herod) against Jesus (Mark 3:6; 8:25; 12:13). Apparently, Herod Antipas wanted to kill Jesus as well—and this fact was reported to Jesus by some Jewish leaders in Galilee who hoped to entice Jesus into moving on to a different area. Jesus was unafraid, however, as we find His response in Luke's Gospel: "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!" (Luke 13:32, 33). Jesus' reply is not only dismissive of Herod but also critical of the Jewish authorities—who had a long history of killing prophets.

As we think about this passage, we need to consider how well we know Jesus. We likewise need to consider whether or not we're truly listening to Him, if we know Him, or if we're tending to resist His Lordship in our lives.

HEROD REFUSED TO REPENT OF SIN (Matthew 14:3, 4)

When it comes to family sin, the apple didn't fall very far from Herod the Great's tree. He was willing to destroy the people and relationships in his life to get what he wanted—regardless of the price or fallout. Herod Antipas divorced his first wife to marry Herodias—the wife of his half-brother, Philip, another tetrarch. According to Josephus, the two fell in love and made plans to get married while Antipas was visiting his brother Philip in Rome. John the Baptist began his ministry during the reigns of Philip and Antipas (Luke 3:1). During his fiery preaching and denunciation of sin, he rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done. Rather than repent, Herod doubled down and had John arrested and thrown in prison.

In light of Herod's story, we need to think about how we respond when someone says something that convicts us of sin or when they push back against our authority. Consider how willing you are to hear them out and truly take the time to look at yourself in the mirror and examine your soul. Herod missed all that God was doing through Jesus because he refused to listen to John's call to repentance.

HEROD WAS A POLITICAL ANIMAL (Matthew 14:5)

Herod was more concerned with playing to the political polls than doing the right thing—morally or as a leader. John the Baptist had irritated Herod, but the way Herod chose to deal with John shows his leaning as a politician and not a leader. "Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet." Herodias hated John and wanted to have him killed, but Herod was afraid to follow through because the general populace was on John's side.

HEROD WAS EASILY MANIPULATED (Matthew 14:6-11)

Herod may have been king, but he allowed himself to be easily manipulated. Mark's Gospel account of this story tells us: "So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him" (Mark 6:19, 20).

Herodias hatched a scheme with her daughter whereby she forced her husband's hand. "On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.' Herod was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother." Once again, Herod demonstrated he was willing to do whatever he needed to do—to sacrifice whoever got in his way—to destroy whatever relationship he need to destroy—no matter the relational fallout.

THE MISSION OF JESUS CONTINUED Matthew 14:12-15)

Following John's execution, Jesus withdrew across the Sea of Galilee—and when He had landed, He continued the mission. What Herod thought he silenced would echo in his ears the rest of his life. What Herod thought he had killed had its message embodied in Jesus. What Herod tried to stop would move forth in power.

Herod Antipas—who would eventually have a hand to play in the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus—missed the opportunity to realign his life with God's best—when he refused to listen to John the Baptist when confronted with his sin. Rather than face himself in the mirror, Herod Antipas arrested and eventually killed the messenger—silencing the critic who might have helped save his soul.

Questions for reflection and action as we look in the mirror:

- How do you respond when confronted with areas in your life that are "less-than-God's-best"?
- Are there times when, like Herod, you'd rather dispense with the people and relationships all around you that prompt you to look in the mirror?
- How do you respond to people who hold up a mirror to you?
- What's your main focus, hope, and goal in your life—and are you open to allowing it to be questioned?
- What are you missing by ignoring or silencing the messengers in your life?
- What do you see as the Holy Spirit holds up the mirror to you?
- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take in order to follow through with His leading?
- Who do you need to tell?
- How can the group help you?

WEEK THREE – MARCH 12

JONAH—LEARNING THE GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYONE

Look in the
MIRROR

Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you come to study. Pray:
“What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

Opening question:
“How have you followed the Spirit’s lead this past week?”

Background and Context: When God called Jonah to go and warn the violent and godless Ninevites of their impending doom, all his pride in being a Hebrew rose up in rebellion. Pagans, to him, were the worst kind of human garbage—not even fit to pollute the good earth by living on it. They were the “untouchables,” and that God would take an interest in them was unthinkable. Therefore, not being one to put up with that which wasn’t to his mind, Jonah fled to Joppa and got himself a passage on a ship bound for Tarshish—which was in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

A human father would probably have shrugged Jonah off in disgust and found someone else more willing to take his message to Nineveh—but not our Heavenly Father. If God has a purpose for someone, then, the gifts and calling of God being irrevocable, they’ll either fulfill God’s purpose, or He’ll simply roll over them to accomplish what He has chosen (Isaiah 46:9, 10). God rolled over Jonah with a vengeance, causing a violent storm to threaten the safety of his ship and its crew—so their indignation at his contented snoring through their danger soon put an end to his satisfaction. This unceremonious awakening also awakened Jonah to the fact he was being followed by the Almighty.

There was nothing to do except confess what he’d been up to and tell the sailors that the only way could they be saved was by dumping him overboard. This they did, and the huge fish sent by God promptly swallowed him up (Jonah 1:17). This, and the immediate stilling of the storm, brought the ship’s crew to faith and salvation as a result (Jonah 1:16).

Jonah then found himself in a situation worse than anything he could’ve imagined—but like Jacob, he has by now awakened to the fact God is with him wherever he ends up—in obedience or disobedience. The result is a beautiful prayer of faith rising up from the belly of the great fish, but still with a hint of spiritual pride: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD” (Jonah 2:8, 9).

In response to this prayer of contrition and faith, the fish then vomits up Jonah on what was likely the shores of Israel. Researchers tell us it must in all probability have been there because it was a three-day journey on foot from that point to the great city of Nineveh. “Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you’” (Jonah 3:1, 2). This time, there’s no argument from Jonah—who, although he may be complying on the outside, is still stubbornly disobeying on the inside.

Jonah finally arrives at Nineveh and strides vengefully through the city—announcing doom and destruction on the people in forty days because of their wickedness and their ignorance of the Lord and His ways. He then retires to a flimsy shelter he builds for himself, probably on a hill overlooking the city, and waits for the fireworks to start (Jonah 4:5).

The result? To his utter chagrin, he finds not just the people from the king down, but their animals as well—clothed in sackcloth and sprinkled with ashes as an indication of their absolute acceptance of the prophetic word sent to them by God—their deep repentance, and their fervent anxiety to get right with the Lord (Jonah 3:5-10).

READ: Jonah 3:10-4:10

As we look at, consider, and get in touch with this passage of scripture, we find there are several things we need to understand:

GOD’S HEART IS TO SAVE THE LOST (Jonah 3:10)

It’s not God’s desire that any should be lost—and in this case, those who lived in Nineveh. When Jonah finally preaches the need for repentance to the people of Nineveh, we’re told the king of Nineveh declared a National Day of Repentance and fasting and as a result of God sparing them. God’s heart is to seek and save the lost. It’s the reason he sent Jonah to Nineveh. It’s the reason Jesus came. It’s the purpose of the church. He wants to save “them.”

JONAH FORGOT THE GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYONE (Jonah 4:1, 2)

Jonah should’ve been thrilled with the results of his mission—the nation turned and was spared by God. But instead he became angry, and his rant reveals the reason he boarded the boat to Tarshish to begin with. He knew God was merciful and compassionate—and if they repented, God would forgive them. It is, after all, what makes our God...well, God. And Jonah’s upset because he wanted to see the Ninevites get what was coming to them.

JONAH BECAME ANGRY WHEN “THEY” GOT SAVED (Jonah 4:3, 4)

Jonah threw a pity party—thinking it was better for him to die than live in a world where people like the Ninevites are forgiven by the Lord. I’m not sure why he felt this way. Perhaps he had a bad experience with some Ninevites in the past. Perhaps he suffered from spiritual arrogance and bigotry that sometimes affects those who “know and love God” when they encounter “those who don’t.” To Jonah and all those who get upset at the scope of God’s love for the world, God asks, “Have you any right to be angry?”

JONAH RESPONDED BY POUTING (Jonah 4:5, 6)

When confronted with his disappointment in the grace of God for others—and his own conviction because of God’s heart-piercing question—Jonah leaves town, goes to a hillside outside of Nineveh, and pouts! The text tells us he was sitting in a shack he built and watched to see what would happen to the city—perhaps believing that God would change His mind and bring judgment on the Ninevites.

But it didn't happen, and Jonah sulks in response. He was there a long time—long enough for a vine to grow and offer him shade and shelter against the desert heat. The truth is—for the second time in his life—Jonah has run away from God or so he thinks.

GOD WANTED JONAH TO REPENT (Jonah 4:7, 8)

After Jonah wallowed for a while, God began to make Jonah uncomfortable again. He sent a worm to kill the vine he'd provided for shelter—turning up the heat. Jonah begins to whine—wishing he would die. What do you think is God's endgame here? He doesn't want the pouting Jonah to die—He wants him to repent! This whole scene reminds us of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. At the end of the story, the older brother is lost—outside the family compound upset with the grace the younger brother has received. And where do we find the father? Outside the house—with the son who's now lost. God never gives up on anyone.

GOD WANTED JONAH TO LOVE THE PEOPLE HE LOVED (Jonah 4:9, 10)

Sometimes we become so shaped by the spirit of offense or a false sense we're spiritually better than everyone else that we miss the truth: "All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." "None of us is righteous—no not one." "We are saved by grace through faith." We all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross, and God wants us to see and love everyone else the way He sees and loves them. So that's Jonah—a reminder to all who fall flat at times when it comes to obedience and who run away from what they know God wants them to do.

Jonah's story is also an object lesson to those possessed of a short fuse and those who are at times guilty of a superior attitude to the spiritually ignorant or immature. Like the Ninevites, many around us are in darkness—and but for the grace of God, so would we be. May we all by that grace read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word!

Questions for reflection and action as we look in the mirror:

- Do we identify with God's heart to save the lost—or do we tend to be like Jonah?
- Are there people in our world we have a difficult time understanding how God could love "them"?
- Who are the Ninevites in your life?
- Have you ever known a time when someone experienced God's grace and you found it difficult to accept—like Jonah with the Ninevites?
- Have you ever allowed your anger to blind you and keep you from God's forgiveness and grace?
- Do you care about the people, places, and things God cares about?
- What do you see as the Holy Spirit holds up the mirror?
- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you concerning sharing the Good News with everyone?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- Who do you need to tell?
- How can the group help?

WEEK FOUR – MARCH 19

DAVID—THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFESSION

Look in the MIRROR

Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you come to study. Pray:
“What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

Opening question:

“How have you followed the Spirit’s lead this past week?”

Background and Context: King David was not a perfect king, but he was chosen by God. David sought the Lord for advice and wisdom throughout his life, waiting for the right moments to lead. And while there are many instances where he was both faithful and sinful, this story is a culmination and revelation of David and how he viewed relationships. What David felt he was doing in secret was known by many. David is confronted by the prophet Nathan—where, through a story, a mirror is held up to David—and he realizes his sin as well as the consequences of his sin. The result is Psalm 51—a psalm that has become a mirror for so many of us.

David was known as a man after God’s own heart—not because he was perfect, but because he was willing to repent and bring his life under God’s Lordship. This week’s text comes right after David coveted and committed adultery with Uriah’s wife—committed murder in an effort cover up her unplanned pregnancy—and then bore false witness in an effort to cover up and hide his sin—for those keeping score. The man after God’s own heart had broken four of the Ten Commandments and was covering it up.

Sometimes, the sin we keep hidden and fail to confess prevents us from living into the future with the hope and freedom Jesus offers us. Everything that happens moving forward in David’s life and family would hinge upon what happened in this text.

READ: 2 Samuel 11:27-12:13 and Psalm 51:1-12

As we look at, consider, and get in touch with this passage of scripture, we find there are several things we need to understand:

WE TRY TO HIDE OUR SIN, BUT GOD KNOWS (2 Samuel 11:27)

We need to tell the backstory of chapter 11—which started when David wasn’t where he was supposed to be—in battle with his men. The series of events that unfolds by his unbridled lust results in David violating four of the Ten Commandments. We find David taking extraordinary measures to hide his actions—thinking he’d gotten away with murder. But God knew and was displeased especially since David was moving forward like nothing was wrong. All too often we work so hard to give the appearance we’re perfect, that nothing is wrong, and we expend untold amounts of energy trying to keep our secret sins—secret. The truth of the matter is the key to spiritual freedom is confession. If we don’t come to the place of confession on our own, God will bring us to the place of confession.

WE SEE OUR SIN IN OTHERS MORE OFTEN THAN OURSELVES (2 Samuel 12:1-6)

The prophet Nathan has a difficult task before him—he has a message to deliver to the most powerful man in his world. It was a message that could very easily cost him his life. So, Nathan begins by telling David a parable designed to appeal to David’s sense of justice—and it works. David reveals something that most, if not all of us, can find true in our lives—that we have the ability to see the sinfulness of our lives in others more readily than we see it in ourselves.

SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES (2 Samuel 12:7-12)

Nathan delivers the word of the Lord that no person—let alone a king—wants to hear. David is about to learn a painful lesson—sin has consequences. Can you just imagine the lightning bolt of conviction that went through David’s soul at that moment? David was told that a sword will rage through his family, that one of his wives would be taken by someone close to him, and in verse 14, the child Bathsheba was carrying would die. David’s house of cards begins to crash down around him. What happens next is one of the reasons David would come to be known as the man after God’s own heart. David repents.

AN HONEST CONFESSION IS THE BEST RESPONSE TO SIN (2 Samuel 12:13)

David doesn’t make excuses. He doesn’t blame anyone else. He doesn’t try to diminish what he did. He simply said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan absolved him of his sin and spared his life. The forgiveness wouldn’t wipe out the consequences, but it did restore David’s soul and his relationship with God. The future of David’s life, reign, and legacy was dependent upon his confession. It was immediate and public—so public it was written into the songbook of the people of God, Psalm 51. David’s confession was shared with those who needed to hear it most—those he had deceived and the God he has offended. And as a result, God restores to him the joy of His salvation.

Sometimes we miss out on the grace of forgiveness because we fail to confess and repent.

Questions for reflection and action as we look in the mirror:

- Have you ever tried to hide your sin in the secret places of your heart and life? What did that feel like?
- Why is it so easy to see the sin in someone else rather than in our own life? Can you recall a time when you were guilty of doing so?
- Do you have a person or a group of people that will hold up the mirror—like Nathan—who will confront you with your sin as well as walk with you as you respond?
- Have you ever been called to be a “Nathan” to another?
- Will you let God forgive you and help you live forgiven and in the light of His love and grace?
- Do you know or remember the joy of salvation and forgiveness?
- What do you see as the Holy Spirit holds up the mirror?
- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take in order to follow through with His leading?
- Who do you need to tell?
- How can the group help you?

WEEK FIVE – MARCH 26

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL— TRADING A PAST FOR A FUTURE

Look in the
MIRROR

Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you come to study. Pray: ***“What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”***

Opening question:

“How have you followed the Spirit’s lead this past week?”

Bottom Line: The woman at the well had a reflection of herself she saw every day, but she didn’t see what Jesus saw. She saw her loneliness, guilt, religion, and faith—and she didn’t like what she saw. But Jesus saw something else. He saw a woman who was trying to find herself in relationships, marriages, and was still the loneliest person in the room. Jesus offered her life and a new start, and she became an evangelist—a disciple that couldn’t keep silent.

The story of the nameless Samaritan woman at the well is found only in the Gospel of John. The Samaritans were a race of people the Jews utterly despised as having no claim on their God. This Samaritan woman was an outcast and looked down upon by even her own people. That’s why she came alone to draw water from the community well during the heat of the day—rather than drawing water was in the cool of the day while chatting with the other women in town. It was the social highpoint of a woman’s day. This woman, however, was ostracized and marked as immoral—an unmarried woman living openly with the sixth in a series of men.

The account of the woman at the well teaches us God loves us despite our bankrupt lives. God values us enough to actively seek us, to welcome us to intimacy, and to rejoice in our worship. As a result of Jesus’ conversation, only a person like the Samaritan woman—an outcast from her own people—could understand what this means. To be wanted, to be cared for when no one—not even herself—could see anything of value in her, this is grace indeed. Sometimes we miss what God wants to offer us because of religious disputes or the consequences of personal choices.

READ: John 4:4-30

As we look at, consider, and get in touch with this passage of scripture we find that there are several things we need to understand:

JESUS SHOWS UP AT UNEXPECTED PLACES AND CROSSES ALL KINDS OF BOUNDARIES (John 4:4-9)

Jesus, tired from His journey, comes to Jacob’s well located in the town of Sychar—a Samaritan town. Jews and Samaritans didn’t mix. The encounter He has with the Samaritan woman reminds us Jesus came for everyone—all kinds of people. Jesus ministers to those outcasts of the Jewish society (the Samaritans)—revealing that all people are valuable to God and that Jesus desires us to demonstrate love to everyone—including even our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

The same is true today—Jesus often shows up in the most unexpected places and crosses all kinds of boundaries. Can you think of a place where Jesus wouldn't go to seek and save the lost?

JESUS APPEALS TO HER NEED (John 10:10-15)

Salvation comes only to those who recognize their desperate need for the spiritual life they don't have. Living water can be obtained only by those who recognize they're spiritually thirsty. When Jesus asks the woman for a drink, she throws the Jew/Samaritan divide up to Him. But Jesus is only using the request for a drink to get below the surface of her heart and life. He speaks to her about his ability to give her living water welling up that'll never run dry. She notices He can't draw for the well is deep, but she wants to know where this living water can be found. She wants to know where she can find it, so she doesn't have to come to the well alone any longer. Jesus is the Living Water—and the only source of the eternal life she needs.

JESUS NAMES THE SOURCE OF HER BROKENNESS (John 4:16-18)

Salvation comes only to those who confess and repent of their sin and desire forgiveness. Before this immoral woman could embrace the Savior, she had to concede the full burden of her sins. Jesus knows why she's there in the heat of the day. Jesus knows why she's alone and isolated. Jesus knows she has a past—but before He can give her a future, He asks her to acknowledge her past. He asks her to go and get her husband—to which she replies she has no husband. Jesus commends her for being honest and tells her He knows everything about her. No judgment. No condemnation. Just love. Acceptance. And an openness she hasn't seen in her life. But she's not quite ready...

SHE DEFLECTS THE CONVERSATION TO "RELIGION"—BUT JESUS OFFERS RELATIONSHIP (John 4:19-26)

The woman at the well is just like us—when God gets a bit too close, we often retreat into "religion" or differences in "religious interpretation." Meanwhile, the Messiah is standing right in front of her ready to accept, forgive, and restore. She's changed.

SHE TRADES HER PAST FOR THE FUTURE JESUS OFFERS HER—AND TELLS EVERYONE! (John 4:27-30)

The disciples returned, surprised Jesus is talking with "her"—and she leaves her water jar and returns to town to tell anyone who will listen: "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

Our testimony about Jesus is a powerful tool in leading others to believe in Him. A few verses later, John's Gospel tell us: "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So, when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world'" (John 4:39-42).

Sometimes, we miss out on the movement of God in our lives because we hold onto our broken past rather than lean into a redeemed and hopeful future. Jesus didn't judge the woman—He engaged her. He didn't condemn her—He encouraged her. He didn't offer her something she didn't need—He gave her what she desperately needed.

Questions for reflection and action as we look in the mirror:

- How do you view yourself in the mirror?
- How do you think Jesus views you?
- Are you lonely? Can you accept Jesus' vision and call on your life?
- What's keeping you from seeing what Jesus sees?
- What's He showing you as you look in the mirror?
- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- Who do you need to tell?
- How can the group help?

WEEK SIX – APRIL 2

THE PALM SUNDAY CROWD— WHEN WE NEED TO CHOOSE

Look in the
MIRROR

Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you come to study. Pray: ***“What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”***

Opening question:

“How have you followed the Spirit’s lead this past week?”

Bottom Line: The Palm Sunday crowd was filled with all kinds of people with different assumptions and expectations—the colt owner who was willing to allow Jesus to use whatever he had—the disciples acting in obedience with excitement as their rabbi stepped onto the stage with a prophetic act for which the crowds clamored—the crowd filled with Passover Pilgrims yearning for the day the Messiah would come and set things right and who got swept up in the excitement of the moment and welcomed Jesus as a conquering king and fulfillment of prophecy—the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders who were threatened and afraid due to Jesus’ rising popularity, fearing the Romans would see this as a seditious threat and shut down Passover. The Palm Sunday crowd reminds us the way we respond to Jesus depends on where we stand with Him and the view from there.

Palm Sunday is the day we celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem one week before His resurrection (Matthew 21:1-11). As Jesus entered the holy city, He neared the culmination of a long journey toward Golgotha. He’d come to save the lost (Luke 19:10), and now was the time—this was the place—to secure that salvation. Palm Sunday marked the start of what is often called “Passion Week,” the final seven days of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Palm Sunday was the “beginning of the end” of Jesus’ work on earth.

Several important contextual items help us understand the passages related to Palm Sunday. First is significance of the location. The events of the first Palm Sunday took place on the last half mile of the pilgrim road from Jericho to Jerusalem. It would have been jammed with pilgrims heading to celebrate the Passover later that week.

Next is the significance of the road: not only was this the pilgrim road—it is also the road coming off the ridge of the Mount of Olives that was used for the exit of every defeated king and the entrance of every conquering king. Then comes the significance of the Mount of Olives in prophecy—seen as the place where the long-expected Messiah will come, or Jesus will return.

Then comes the symbolic significance of Jesus, riding on the foal of a donkey, sending a powerful signal of who He is—the coming Messiah. The crowd is composed of three groups of people: the followers of Jesus, the Passover pilgrims, and the religious leaders. Their interplay is significant because of their perspectives. Many of the same people who shouted “Hosanna” on Sunday would scream “Crucify” on Friday.

READ: Luke 19:28-44

As we look at, consider, and get in touch with this passage of scripture, we find there are several things we need to understand:

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF THE KING (Luke 19:28-31)

This text begins the last week of Jesus' life. It's a culmination of His 33 years on earth and 3 years of public ministry. He's made the pilgrimage from Galilee down the Jordan Valley to Jericho—and sung the Psalms of Ascent as He climbed the pilgrim's path from Jericho to the back side of the towns of Bethphage and Bethany one last time. While Jesus has been preparing for this moment for His entire life, these last minute preparations would set the stage for a powerful fulfillment of prophecy.

He sent two unnamed followers to secure the colt of the donkey upon which He would ride. This is the first and only time we see Jesus riding in the Bible—He usually walked—but this was a special occasion and the ride was a powerful symbol. How have you been preparing for the coming of King Jesus in your life and our world?

PREPARE BY LETTING JESUS USE WHAT HE NEEDS (Luke 19:32-34)

Some 450 to 500 years prior to Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, the prophet Zechariah had prophesied the event we now call Palm Sunday: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! / Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! / See, your king comes to you, / righteous and victorious, / lowly and riding on a donkey, / on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). The prophecy was fulfilled in every particular, and it was indeed a time of rejoicing as Jerusalem welcomed their King. Unfortunately, the celebration was not to last. The crowds looked for a Messiah who would rescue them politically and free them nationally, but Jesus had come to save them spiritually. First things first, and mankind's primary need is spiritual, not political, cultural, or national salvation.

The two disciples found the colt just as Jesus told them it would be and the owner gave them the animal. This passage reminds me everything I have is at the disposal of Jesus. He is the owner, and I am the steward. When He needs it, I need to be willing to be open-handed enough to allow Him to have it. We need to consider what it is we have that Jesus can use.

PREPARE BY JOINING IN THE CELEBRATION (Luke 19:35-38)

The disciples led the way by covering the colt with their outer garments and putting Jesus on the back of the colt. As Jesus ascended toward Jerusalem, a large multitude gathered around Him. This crowd understood Jesus was the Messiah; what they didn't understand was it wasn't time to set up the kingdom yet—although Jesus had tried to tell them so (Luke 19:11, 12). The crowd's actions along the road give rise to the name "Palm Sunday": "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road" (Matthew 21:8). In strewing their cloaks on the road, the people were giving Jesus the royal treatment—King Jehu was given similar honor at his coronation (2 Kings 9:13). On that first Palm Sunday, the people also honored Jesus verbally. "Hosanna...God save us!" In their praise of Jesus, the Jewish crowds were quoting Psalm 118:25-26, an acknowledged prophecy of the Christ.

PREPARE TO ADDRESS OPPOSITION (Luke 19:39, 40)

The allusion to a Messianic psalm drew resentment from the religious leaders present: “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’” (Luke 19:39). Jesus, however, saw no need to rebuke those who told the truth. He replied, “I tell you . . . if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40). When we decide we’re going to join in the celebration of ushering King Jesus into the world, we need to understand we’ll face opposition—but we need to remember to continue to celebrate! Don’t stop witnessing. Don’t stop ushering King Jesus into His rightful place in your heart and life.

PREPARE TO WEEP OVER THE THINGS OVER WHICH JESUS WEEPS (Luke 19:41-44)

Even as the coatless multitudes waved the palm branches and shouted for joy, they missed the true reason for Jesus’ presence. They could neither see nor understand the cross. That’s why, “as [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies . . . will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (Luke 19:41-47). It’s a tragic thing to see the Savior but not recognize Him for who He is. The crowds who were crying out “Hosanna!” on Palm Sunday were crying out “Crucify Him!” later that week (Matthew 27:22, 23).

There’ll come a day when time as we know it ends and King Jesus will come in all of His glory. On that day, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10, 11). On that day, the worship will be real. On that day, all of creation will join these palm-bearing saints and shout, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Revelation 21:10), and who can measure the sum of their joy?

Questions for reflection and action as we look in the mirror:

- Where do you find yourself in the story?
- Are you announcing and preparing for the coming of Jesus?
- Are you shouting Hosanna—God save us!?!?
- What do you have that Jesus needs to use? How willing are you to allow Him to have it? Are you living with an open hand?
- How do you face times of opposition?
- Are you weeping over the things that break God’s heart?
- Are you prepared to encounter and experience Jesus?
- What do you see as the Holy Spirit holds up the mirror?
- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?
- What next steps do you need to take?
- Who do you need to tell?
- How can the group help?

