Little One
INSPIRED BY JESUS

The beautiful artwork featured in this devotional guide was created by gifted painter, Yongsung Kim. Yongsung spent his youth in the countryside of South Korea, marveling at its peaceful landscapes, as well as his homeland’s bountiful colors and textures. This same harmonious esthetic can be found in many of Yongsung’s paintings.

Yongsung started painting in Middle School and spent much of his younger years drawing and sketching. As an adult, Yongsung became a follower of Jesus and decided to live a life devoted to bringing glory to God. Though he never formally studied painting, God had blessed him with a natural talent, and so, Yongsung began a life-long career as a Christian artist.

The main theme and focus of Yongsung’s paintings are primarily about Jesus. Yongsung has been quoted as saying, “In a world with an increasing culture of violence and darkness, in addition to decreasing bright and clean depictions of religion, I want to shed Christ’s light on this new generation.”

To learn more about Youngsung Kim and see more of his artwork, please visit https://havenlight.com/collections/yongsung-kim.

BACK COVER: Narrow Is The Way
WITH US ALWAYS
John 1:1-34

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

REFLECT

We begin this year’s Lenten devotional guide with John 1:1-34. If you haven’t already, please take a few minutes to read this passage.

The prologue of John’s gospel (1:1-18) is foundational for our faith. Not only does John identify the Word as “with God,” but the Word was God Himself (1:1). John later expands on this, noting that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). The word “dwell” used here is the same Greek word used for “tabernacle,” the place where the presence of God would dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8). I love Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this verse in The Message, which reads, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”

Though this verse is often associated with Advent, the incarnation of Christ is a great place to start this Lenten season. God Himself became flesh and blood to do what no man or woman could do: forgive sin, cancel debt, and create a way back to communion with Himself. Just as God dwelled on earth through the tabernacle and His Son, Jesus Christ, He later made a way to dwell within His children through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

As we ready ourselves for this Lenten journey, I want to encourage you to think through the implications of God dwelling or “tabernacling” with you.

• He is with you through anxiousness of the unknown.
• He is with you as you grieve the loss of what once was.
• He is with you as you rejoice over a passed exam.
• He is with you as you balance the budget.
• He is with you as you welcome new life into the world.

And, He is with you always (Matthew 28:20). The Triune God is with us even now as we begin this season of both personal and corporate preparation to celebrate our salvation through the Messiah, Jesus.

PRAY

Lord, thank You for being our Good Shepherd. We could never do anything to deserve Your love, yet You freely give it. Thank You for this gift. Inspire us and equip us to share it with all of Your children. Amen.

Kara Fincher
Kara Fincher is the Associate Minister to College Students at Dawson. She and her husband, Caleb, were married in 2020 and are passionate about worship, music, and discipleship.
COME AND YOU WILL SEE
John 1:35-51

Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.”

REFLECT

Who introduced you to Jesus? I had always gone to church with my family because “that’s what I was supposed to do.” Later, my older brother was led to join his girlfriend’s church. When I was 15, my brother and my boyfriend (now my husband) invited me to their youth choir homecoming concert. During the concert, I felt many different emotions and finally understood that Jesus wanted to come into my heart! He died for my sins, forgave me, and wanted me to trust and follow Him.

Throughout his ministry, John the Baptist never confused his purpose of pointing the way to Jesus, the Messiah. At the beginning of this passage, John the Baptist is with two of his disciples, Andrew and John. In John 1:36, John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” After hearing this, Andrew and John followed Jesus. Andrew then told his brother, Peter, about Jesus. For centuries, Jews had been waiting for the Messiah to deliver Israel, so Peter was eager to go and see.

Next, Jesus found Philip and told him to “follow me.” Philip then told Nathanael about Jesus. And Jesus, much to Nathanael’s surprise, told him that He knew him. Just imagine what Nathanael would have missed if he believed “nothing good could come out of Nazareth.” The disciples knew who Jesus was and wanted their friends to know Him. Jesus invited them all to “come and see.”

At work one day, I was talking to a co-worker about some things she was going through. It just happened to be the same week my oldest daughter, Franny, had passed away, eight years before. I reminded her of this and she said, “I don’t know how you get through your day.” I told her, “only through Jesus!” He gives me strength every day. I know Franny is with Him, and I will see her again!

God created us to know Him, serve Him, and tell others about Him. He knows who we are, like Nathanael, and who we are going to become, like Peter.

Do you really know Jesus Christ? If you do, who do you need to tell?

PRAY

Lord, help us to spend more time with You, so we can know You better and tell others about You. Amen.
FRONT ROW SEAT
John 2:1-25

His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

John 2:17

REFLECT

Several days before the wedding in John 2, a small group of men began to follow Jesus and would become His disciples. Little did they know that this would be the first of many proverbial “third days.” Their trip to Cana would provide a front row seat to the first of “greater things than these” Jesus had promised just the day before.

Wine had long been a sign of joy and blessing in the land of Israel. When Jesus’ mother came to Him in verse 3 to report, “They have no wine,” a social crisis was hanging in the balance. Notice that Mary did not come to Him with suggestions but only with the problem. He wants us to bring our cares to Him (1 Peter 5:7) and He will be our help (Psalm 121). Jesus’ simple kindness of turning water to wine (and “good” wine at that) not only saved the honor of a humble Galilean family, but also was an offering of Himself as “wine” fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 55).

Over the next few days, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem (v. 13). All Jewish men who were able-bodied traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. At the temple, priests offered sacrifices for sins. Animals were available on-site for purchase because of the distances some would travel to get there. It is here that Jesus found the temple being used as a market. Jesus was outraged by the distraction from the temple’s purpose. Then John points out in verse 17 that the disciples remembered what was written: Zeal for your house will consume me (Psalm 69:9).

Many who observed Jesus’ signs would later reject Him because their belief was based on signs alone. The disciples believed in Him (v. 11) because His words and actions aligned with Scripture. This passage reminds us to open our eyes to the signs of Christ bringing His words to life around us every day. May His words be the source that guide us to His undeniable presence in our lives.

PRAY

Lord, open our eyes to the everyday works of Your hand in our lives so that we may believe in You. Thank You for providing all that we need in Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

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Eric Blackman

Eric and his wife Lindsey have four children: Virginia, Charlotte, Sadie, and James. They have been attending Dawson since mid-2018. Eric enjoys leading worship with Dawson’s worship team and for Celebrate Recovery. He and Lindsey serve in a Preschool Life Group.
PSALM 19

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.
7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
12 Who can discern his errors?
declare me innocent from hidden faults.
13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
YOU ARE LOVED
John 3:1-21

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

REFLECT
As you read today’s Scripture passage, notice how Nicodemus visited Jesus and immediately began asking Him questions. Nicodemus was an educated man, so what was he seeking? No matter a person’s background, there are seekers all around us. Are you equipped to answer questions if someone approaches you about Jesus?

As a child, the first Bible passage I memorized was John 3:16. It remains one of my favorite verses: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

I had many questions as a child, and this verse answered them for me. Does God love me? Yes! The world includes you and me. He loved me before I even knew who He was. How much does God love me? He loves me so much that He gave His one and only Son. It is hard for me to imagine that God sacrificed His own Son so you and I would have an opportunity to have a relationship with Him. Who can receive this gift God offers? Whoever believes in Him (Jesus). This is more than just head knowledge. This is believing that Jesus is who He said He is and did what He said He would do.

Another question I had is why does God love me? He loves me (us) so we will not perish. God desires a relationship with each one of us. He desires that we not die in our sin. Finally, how long will God’s love last? This is an eternal love, an everlasting love. One of my favorite songs is “Amazing Love, How Can it Be?” by Chris Tomlin. Take some time today to listen to this song.

If you don’t have a relationship with the Lord already, becoming a follower of Jesus is as easy as ABC:

A – Admit to God that you are a sinner and turn away from your wrong actions.
B – Believe that Jesus is God’s Son and that He paid the penalty for our sins, then accept this free gift of God’s forgiveness.
C – Confess that you want Jesus in your heart as Savior, then follow Him as Lord.

PRAY
Father, thank You for Your amazing love and sacrifice. Help us today to honor You with our thoughts and follow You with our hearts. Amen.

Debbie Moss
Debbie, Dawson’s Minister of Health and Wellness, ministers to people of all ages. Debbie has directed multiple medical missions to more than 35 countries from the inner-city to remote bush locations, assisting nationals in preventing disease and providing quality healthcare while sharing the Gospel.
Monday, February 22

YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND
John 3:22-36

For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

John 3:34

REFLECT

Have you ever said to someone, “you don’t understand,” or has someone ever said it to you? In Scripture, “understanding” is linked to other virtues:

- In Proverbs 14:29, understanding is linked to patience. Do we have patience?
- In Proverbs 4:7, understanding and wisdom go together and it costs us everything. Do we give everything to receive wisdom from God?
- In John 14:26-27, we receive understanding as God gives us His peace. Do we have God's peace?

In John 3, both Jesus and John the Baptist answer questions of understanding. In John 3:1-21, Jesus and Nicodemus (a member of the Sanhedrin) have a conversation about who Jesus was and how a person could have a relationship with Him. Jesus answered Nicodemus’ questions by explaining who He was.

We are challenged to read slowly and ponder with a humble spirit as Jesus continued to answer Nicodemus in John 3:16-17. It is interesting to note that scholars believe Nicodemus did become a follower of Jesus evidenced by his actions on Jesus’ behalf both before and after His crucifixion.

In verses 22-36, we see that John the Baptist, who paved the way for Jesus, was also questioned about what he thought of Jesus. Because Jesus was baptizing more people than John, someone questioned Jesus’ identity since John called Him “the Lamb of God.” John gave a quick answer to the question by saying that he must decrease while Jesus must increase. In verse 31, John told those who were gathered around listening that He who comes from above is above all, while those who come from earth belong to earth. Do we clearly identify our humble position in light of who Jesus is?

John the Baptist was a compelling witness and said these amazing words about Jesus in verses 35-36: “The Father has sent the Son, and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

PRAY

Father in Heaven who sent Your Son to bear witness of Your Spirit, may we delete the question of “I don’t understand” when it comes to You. In this Lenten season, may we study Your Word fresh and new and seek light in our prayers. He must increase, but we must decrease. Amen.

Mike Hathorne
Serving and participating in the many opportunities at Dawson along with the joy of family time with his wife Gail, son Michael Chadwick, daughter-in-law Heather, and granddaughter Yancey Katherine, is what encourages Mike to finish the race.
Tuesday, February 23

LIVING WATER
John 4:1-42

And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

_REFLECT_

Why did Jesus have to pass through Samaria? Maybe because it was the most direct path from Judea to Galilee, but maybe this was also a part of a sovereign and providential plan.

This would have been a surprise to His disciples and most devout Jews. They would bypass Samaria out of animosity and to avoid defilement. Jews and non-Jews alike hated and showed contempt toward Samaritans because they were a racially mixed group of both Jewish and Gentile ancestry. Jesus not only traveled through Samaria but did what was culturally unheard of by talking to a Samaritan woman.

Jesus offered the Samaritan woman more than physical water could ever provide. He offered her living water (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a believer). But, just like in conversations that Jesus had with Nicodemus or even with His disciples, He spoke on a different level than His listener understood.

Jesus asked the woman to get her husband to come to the well. In the back and forth of the conversation, we see much of her dirty laundry on display. Her previous five husbands and the man she was currently living with were exposed. I wonder if this portion of the story is revealed not to embarrass or condemn, but to show her (and maybe us too) that Jesus is like no other. He has the ability to be omniscient and grace-filled simultaneously. We all desire someone who knows every part of us (the good, the bad, and the ugly) and will still love us and desire a relationship with us. The Samaritan woman at the well accepted Jesus’ offer of living water and was forever changed.

Jesus used a Samaritan woman of ill repute to herald His message of eternal life. He knew her, her life history, and still pursued her with His love. He knows us, our history, and still pursues us with His love.

_PRAY_

Heavenly Father, thank You for the living water that You provide. The Samaritan woman did not deserve it, but You gave freely. The Samaritan woman, I, and many others are eternally grateful. Amen.

Danielle Eldridge
Danielle is mom to Hayden, Luke, and Jonathan, and wife to our Pastor David. She is now teaching part-time at Edgewood Elementary in Homewood, and loves serving at Dawson as a 10th Grade Girls’ Life Group Leader.
A DESPERATE FATHER
John 4:43-54

The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

John 4:49-50

REFLECT

I’m filled with joy whenever I read how Jesus healed the official’s son. “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” I have felt the anguish of having a son close to death and then recover with a miraculous healing. When our middle son, Mack, was born, he was taken immediately to the NICU as his face had turned blue. I followed the nurses carrying his tiny frame through the hospital and watched as they started connecting him to the machines that would monitor his body functions.

When Nancy and I were still counting his life in hours not days, we were told of numerous complications that now threatened him and how surgeries were likely but they might not be able to save him. After this news, I walked down the hall and found an empty hospital room and fell to my knees in prayer. I cried out to God to heal my son just like the official had done. As I prayed, I felt God comforting me and telling me He would be walking beside me whether or not Mack lived.

Over the coming days, all of Mack’s problems went away. It was easy to tell which doctors were Christians as some looked on in stunned disbelief and others just smiled and said a miracle had been performed. I’m not sure why God chose to heal Mack and not the other children who were lying beside him in the NICU. His healing solidified my faith in an all-powerful God who can overcome any circumstance or trial you may face. God still works miracles today.

But the son’s healing isn’t the end of the passage about the official. “And he himself believed, and all his household” (v. 53). We also are called to share with others what God has done so that they too may become believers.

We may not all have a “Miracle Mack” to talk about, but we have all been blessed with God’s grace and salvation through His Son, Jesus. Do you believe? If so, tell others so that they may believe.

PRAY

God, thank You for Your saving Grace. Thank You for the miracles You are still performing today. God give us courage to share how you have worked in our lives so that others may believe, too. Amen.

Chris Hartin

Chris became a Dawson member more than 20 years ago. He is married to his best friend, Nancy, and is the father to three fabulous young men: Cole, Mack, and Brice. Nancy and Chris lead a Life Group for Young Professionals.
Thursday, February 25

JESUS IS GOD ETERNAL
John 5:1-30

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

John 5:24

REFLECT

In the middle of Jesus’ ministry, He healed a man at Bethesda’s pool in Jerusalem. The Jewish religious leaders persecuted Him for healing on the Sabbath and breaking their Sabbath rules. Jesus replied to them in verse 17: “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” The Pharisees instantly grasped that Jesus was claiming to be equal with God and charged Him with blasphemy.

In verses 19-24, Jesus answered their charge by teaching them about His equality with God: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” Only someone equal to God could always do what God does.

The Pharisees were stunned at this, but Jesus went on and described the motivation behind the unique relationship between the Father and the Son: “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all the things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.” In this statement, the word “love” is in the present tense; it is continuous, repeated, and eternal. This holy Father-Son love relationship has always been and will continue eternally. No one but the Son could claim this bond with the Father.

Jesus then illustrated His equality with God. He has the same power as the Father to raise the dead and give life, and the Father has given Him all judgment. He will receive the same honor as the Father who sent Him. There has never been—nor will there ever be—anyone but Jesus who could possess these same attributes. Jesus confirmed His authority, reminding the Jewish leaders who will receive eternal life. The hope that stands to this day: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (v. 24).

Additionally, in Hebrews 1:8, God called Jesus God! Of the Son, He says, “Your throne, O God [Jesus Christ], is forever and ever.” Jesus is God Eternal.

PRAY

Father, we want to see and hear and know God the Father and God the Son as one through Your Word. Bring us to a Bible-centered knowledge, Lord. Teach us by Your Spirit, in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Sharon Wells
Sharon Wells has led adult Bible studies at Dawson for more than 20 years both as Adult Life Group Leader and Inductive Bible Study Leader for Wednesday Women’s and Co-ed Bible studies.
Friday, February 26

HOW MUCH LONGER?
John 5:31-47

“How do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”

John 5:45-46

REFLECT

“How much longer?” is the constant question asked by a child. Usually, we adults give the mathematical answer to that question as if that would settle his or her impatient little self.

The Lenten season is one of contemplation and anticipation. A glance at the calendar and some mathematics produces the answer to, “How much longer?” Imagine waiting countless years. How does one answer the question, “How much longer,” when the answer is beyond reach? Hope and patience becomes the condition for all young and old little selves.

Moses pre-dated Christ by 1,400 years. He prophesied: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen” (Deuteronomy 18:15). Later, after all of the prophets of the Old Testament had come and gone, a postscript was added to this book of Moses which states: And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10). In all of those years, a prophet like Moses had not arrived. “How much longer?”

Jesus answered that question. In John 5:31-47, Jesus used an encounter with the religious leaders of that day to announce: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me” (John 5:46). The days of waiting were over, the long-awaited One is here.

In Acts 3, Peter affirmed that Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of this prophecy of Moses, and he called for the people to repent and turn to Jesus.

Yes, the Lenten season is a period of anticipation, and it is a reminder that we are now awaiting the return of Jesus. As we live in faithfulness to the One who has saved us, we eagerly ask, “How much longer?”

PRAY

Lord Jesus, as we wait, may we be found faithful as Your servants today. Amen.

Bill Johnston

Bill is married to Janet Dickerson Johnston and they have two sons: Will, and his wife Angela, and Rob. Bill and Janet are also the proud grandparents of Liam and Lucy. Bill has served in churches in Texas and Alabama and has been the Associate Pastor at Dawson since August 2006.
To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.

Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.
FAITH EXCEEDS FEAR
John 6:1-21

When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

John 6:19-20

REFLECT

In today’s passage, we focus on numbers four and five of the seven Messianic signs in the book of John. Beginning in John 6:1, Jesus, accompanied by His disciples, walked to a mountaintop and was followed by a large crowd who had heard about all of His miracles. The disciples counted 5,000 men and knew that they were hungry. They worried how they could feed such a number. A young boy had only five loaves of barley and two fish, but that would not feed everyone. However, Jesus gave thanks to God for His provision and when the food was distributed, there was enough to satisfy the hunger of everyone. There was even enough remaining to collect twelve baskets of leftovers. The crowd was amazed by Jesus’ miracle and said, “This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world” (v. 14). Jesus performed this miracle despite much doubt all around Him.

How many times a day do we face troubles that seem impossible? Far too often I find myself taking the weight of my problems on my shoulders, doubting that God can help me solve them. However, this miracle teaches us that we cannot solve our larger-than-life problems alone. It is a humble reminder that not only does Jesus satisfy every need we have, He also exceeds anything we could have done alone.

The fifth sign is one that truly amazes the child within me. One night, the disciples encountered a storm while in a boat. Jesus appeared walking on the water’s surface. He told them, “It is I. Don’t be afraid” (v. 20). When they realized it was Jesus, their fears were calmed, and He got in the boat. The disciples’ journey and encounter with the storm mimic the anxiety and fears we feel every day that create “storms” in our lives. However, we do not have to bear the burdens of this fear alone, but rather can relieve that worry by depending on Jesus’ calming presence. Jesus shows us in this miracle that He is there in the midst of everything, no matter how big or small our personal storms seem.

As we reflect on His unique miracles, we can see that He will satisfy every problem we encounter, as well as surpass what we could have done on our own. How would it look in your life to hand over your personal “storms” to Him daily?

PRAY

Dear Lord, You alone are enough. Thank You for the many blessings You give us each day. Please help us to hand over our problems to You daily, and may our fears never detract from Your glory. May we never doubt Your presence in our lives. Amen.

Blakely Ellison

Blakely grew up attending Dawson and is currently a student at UAB, majoring in Elementary Education. She loves working with the Preschool Ministry and teaching at Dawson’s Day School. Blakely is passionate about sharing the love of Jesus with children, baking, and spending time with family.
THE BREAD OF LIFE
John 6:22-39

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

John 6:35

REFLECT

In the human brain, more specifically in the hypothalamus of the brain, lies the satiety center, which helps to regulate the feeling of hunger in the body. The satiety center works by detecting certain hormones and fat levels in the bloodstream that tell us when we are “full” or when we are “hungry.” Meals that are high in fat content help to keep the satiety center satisfied to where we feel full for a longer period of time, while simple sugar foods like candy or bread have a much shorter duration of “fullness” to them. Regardless of what is eaten or when it is eaten, one thing is for sure: at some point during the day, the feeling of hunger will be detected and felt by the human body.

In John 6, Jesus talked about a different type of hunger. Here, Jesus proclaimed that He is the “Bread of Life” and that whoever comes to Him would never hunger or thirst again. Jesus was not talking about the physical hunger that we experience when our stomachs growl. This kind of hunger can even produce physical discomfort. Instead, Jesus talked about the spiritual hunger that resides in each one of us. This hunger can only be satisfied by filling ourselves with Jesus Christ, the true Bread of Life.

When God the Father created us, He created within us a desire to seek and follow Him. Some people may call this our spiritual hunger. Too many times, we try to feed our spiritual hunger with things that are not of God—things that can include a desire for wealth, power, alcohol or drugs, sex, and anything else that can distract us from focusing on and following God the Father and His Son, Jesus.

Nothing can, or ever will, satisfy this spiritual hunger other than Jesus. When we fill our spiritual hunger with Jesus, when we put our trust in Him for our salvation and make Him the Lord of our life, and when we make life choices according to His principles and wisdom, we experience what it means to not be hungry and to never thirst again.

PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us and for giving us the gift of eternal life through Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for using Him to be the perfect example of how we should live each and every day. Just as we hunger for physical nourishment, may we never lose the hunger for the spiritual nourishment that You provide to us through Your Word, through Your Holy Spirit, and through prayer. Give us opportunities and the boldness to share this Bread of Life with a world that needs it. Amen.

Craig Martin
Craig has been a member of Dawson for more than 30 years. He and his wife, Bess, have been married for 25 years. They have four children: Elle, Kennedy, George, and Mae.
ABANDONING SELF FOR CHRIST
John 6:60-71

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

John 6:68-69

REFLECT

John 6 is the longest chapter in John’s Gospel, and it mainly focuses on the theme of spiritual bread, which is a metaphor for spiritual sustenance. Some call this passage a “theological masterpiece” of the New Testament.

Earlier in this chapter Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” Many people were attracted to Jesus as a person. They were impressed by His ability to captivate a crowd with His works and His words. But when the points of Jesus’ sermon got sharp, these followers retreated and walked away. Many followers felt that His sayings were very hard, and as a result, they experienced spiritual misunderstanding.

Jesus then said to the twelve, “Will you also go away?” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” This was John’s version of Peter’s great confession of faith. Here we see him profess his full love and loyalty to the Savior.

In the book, Why Christ Came, by Joel R. Beeke and William Boekestein, the authors write, “Christ’s language in John 6 refers not to a physical act but to the spiritual act of feeding on Him in our hearts by faith. First, we develop an appetite for Christ by committing our hearts to Him, knowing that only He can satisfy our deepest longings. Second, we meditate upon Him. Third, we delight in Him. Finally, we feed upon Him regularly.”

Peter is mentioned more times in the four Gospels than anyone other than Jesus. He was also praised and rebuked more than any other disciple. He had a personal and very intimate relationship with Jesus that allowed him to abandon his nets, ambitions, and desires to follow Him. Even though Peter displayed human weakness when he denied Jesus three times on the night of His arrest, Jesus later restored Peter and made the truth of Peter’s confession the rock upon which He built His church. This same relationship that Peter had with Jesus is also available to every person who is willing to seek Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

PRAY

“Break Thou the bread of life, Dear Lord to me as Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea. Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord. My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word.” Amen.

Mary Jackson
Mary and Larry have been Dawson members for 50 years. They serve in the Middle School Ministry. The Jacksons have three adult children and six grandchildren.
OPENING OUR EYES
John 7:1-31

So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”

John 7:16-17

REFLECT

In the beginning of this chapter, Jesus’ own brothers advised Him to attend the Feast of Booths. They believed that this would be a perfect opportunity for Jesus to reveal His identity to the large crowd at the feast. Jesus answered His brothers by saying, “I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.” Jesus’ brothers could not understand why He was working in secret for now.

The advice from Jesus’ brothers stems from their unbelief and misunderstanding of Jesus’ true identity. We often read this passage and then criticize Jesus’ brothers. It is hard to fathom that for the first 30 years of Jesus’ life, not even His own brothers believed in Him. They lived with Him, they ate with Him, and yet, they still did not believe in Him. How is this possible? They refused to trust Jesus’ words. His brothers believed that they knew what was best. They did not fully trust in the plan of God. So often, we do this in our own lives. We believe we know what is best, and in turn, we fail to trust in the plan that God has for our lives.

Jesus attended this feast anyway: “But after His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He also went up, not publicly, but in private.” At the feast, Jesus began teaching in the middle of the temple. Many of the Jews listening doubted His teaching. They asked, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” The Jewish authorities were doing everything in their power to try and discredit Jesus. They accused Him of being possessed by a demon, and criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath. They failed to trust in the identity of Jesus. The hardened hearts of the Jewish leaders and of Jesus’ brothers prevented them from seeing the true identity and the good works of Jesus.

In response to this passage, we are called to trust in the identity of Jesus, and find comfort in God’s plan, even when we cannot fully understand what He has in store.

PRAY

God, You are so good. I pray that in response to this passage, as followers of Christ, You give us the strength to lay down our pride, to lay down our selfish desires, and to tear down any barrier that is preventing us from truly experiencing You and Your goodness. We are dependent upon You. Let us trust in Your promises, and in Your goodness. Amen.

Ben Hewitt

Ben Hewitt serves on staff at Dawson as the Interim Associate Minister to Middle School Students. He is married to Elizabeth Hewitt. He graduated from Samford University and is currently working on his Master of Divinity through Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.
Thursday, March 4

FAITH OVER REASON
John 7:32-52

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

John 7:37-38

REFLECT

As we look at today’s passage, it’s helpful to understand the background. Jesus had been in Galilee for six months avoiding the religious leaders who wanted to kill Him since it wasn’t His appointed time to die. But it was time for the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths), which He was required to attend as a Jewish man. In Jerusalem there was debate among the people about Jesus; some sought to kill Him, some thought He deceived people, and others thought He was a good man. As Jesus taught, the people were amazed as He addressed every argument and defied the religious leaders. The fact that no one arrested Him led them to ask if He might be the Messiah.

This is where today’s verses pick up. The religious leaders’ power was in question, and they immediately sent guards to arrest Jesus. Meanwhile, Jesus addressed the people’s questions. How could He be the Messiah if He’s from Galilee and not from the city of David? Jesus boldly declared that He was sent by God Himself as Living Water to those who would believe. Some did, while others, despite all the evidence, talked themselves out of believing. Far too often we let our reason, what makes sense, get in the way of trusting Jesus with all the parts of our lives.

We also see the guards bear witness to who Jesus was when the religious leaders questioned why they returned empty-handed. And yet, their pride blinded them to even consider that Jesus may really be who He claimed to be and that before them was the long-awaited Savior of humanity.

One faithful believer, Nicodemus, was a member of the Sanhedrin who had gone to Jesus to see for himself and believed that Jesus was the Son of God. Despite going to Jesus at night, God gave Nicodemus the courage to defend Jesus before the religious leaders, risking everything.

Where do you see yourself in this story? Are you amazed at Jesus, trusting in Him, or are you doubting and defiant, unwilling to submit to give up your position for the One who gave up everything for you?

PRAY

Lord, give us the faith to believe beyond our reason and trust You in all circumstances and the courage to stand up for Your name even when doing so may risk everything. We pray that You will reveal the areas of our life that need to be surrendered to You and the next step of faith to take. Amen.
A REFUGE FOR HUMILIATED SINNERS

John 7:53-8:11

Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

REFLECT

You may notice that today’s passage is marked by brackets or noted as not included in early manuscripts. This may give initial pause, but the reader can move forward with confidence that God, in His sovereign providence over the span of more than 2,000 years, has ordered the text so that the few uncertainties that remain alter no doctrine of the Christian faith. We should worship God because of this! The Bible is the most carefully handled book in all of history. For this particular passage, we can hold its message as true because its point echoes all of the New Testament: namely, the Law exposes our need for grace, found only in the atoning sacrifice who is Christ. The Jesus we meet here is the same Jesus we see throughout all of Scripture.

A woman whose sin meant penalty under the Law was brought before Christ. As she, humiliated, sat under scorn of the Pharisees and scribes, Christ drew near. He was unflinching in the knowledge of who she was. While they sought to hurl condemnation, Jesus questioned their righteousness under the Law. The only One who had the righteousness to stone her, was the One who stood in the line of fire. He could do this, and He does this still, because He took on and experienced all shame, guilt, and sin at the cross. The Jesus of John 8 is the Jesus of this very moment. His heart is gentle and lowly, eager to receive those, burdened and bruised, who come into the light where He is (1 John 1:7).

Where else can humiliated sinners be both honest and safe, but at the feet of Christ? Whatever weighs heavy on you today, whatever the circumstance, He wants to stand near, pull you close, and say “neither do I condemn you.” Awed by His love, holiness, and mercy, may we draw near and live in obedience to “go and sin no more.” We get to do this, not out of fear of punishment, but because our hearts desire to honor Him.

PRAY

Father, we come to You today only by Jesus. We recognize that our sin has brought our own humiliation, but we thank You that you call us to walk in the light. You invite us into Your safe presence and by the work of Your Son, we are safe with You. By Your Spirit, help us today, not to gather stones to cast, but to extend to others the good news of the One who took on the punishment that we deserved. Amen.

Meg Brown

Meg Brown serves with Dawson as the Associate Minister to Children. She is a proud Kentuckian who loves basketball season and enjoys spending time outside with her dog, Russell, or reading a good book with a hot cup of coffee.
1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.
7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,”
12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.
13 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

18 If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

19 Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!

20 They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.

21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

22 I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
FOLLOW THE LIGHT
John 8:12-30

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 8:12

REFLECT

The first time God spoke in the book of Genesis was when He created daylight. English translations use four words, but in Hebrew, one word is all it took, “Light!”

When Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world,” He wasn’t creating anything other than a clear picture of His divinity and purpose. According to verse 20, Jesus was in the temple in Jerusalem near the treasury, which was in the Court of Women. Some Bible scholars believe that this scene occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles, a time in which the Jews commemorate God’s provision during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. For that feast, the Court of Women was illuminated with candles, symbolizing the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites through the desert. This wouldn’t have been the kind of candlelight we might associate with a romantic dinner, but rather, historians tell us that there were enough candles in the temple courtyard to light it up so it was visible from afar (think floodlights.) During the feast, the people of the city could have easily seen where to go at nighttime by using the lighted temple as a point of reference.

For 40 years, God made His presence known to the Israelites with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to guide them through the desert. It had to have been comforting to them to know that Almighty God was with them. However, the light God provided wasn’t just to make His people feel good or to keep them comfortable. His light was only beneficial if they followed where He led them. If they had stayed put and refused to break camp, they would have quickly found themselves in darkness.

So it is with Jesus, who beckons us to follow Him, the Light of the World. He is the Savior sent to dispel spiritual darkness. Will you stay put where you are most comfortable, or will you follow Him wherever He leads?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, please help us follow You wherever You lead, pointing others to Your light so they will no longer have to live in darkness but rather will have the Light of Life. Amen.

Lorna Reeves

The daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries, Lorna grew up in Ecuador and is a graduate of Samford University. She and her husband, Brent Reeves, who is Dawson’s organist, have two adult children. Lorna sings in the Sanctuary Choir and co-teaches a Women’s Life Group.
Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

John 8:58

REFLECT

The opposition to Jesus in this passage is appalling. These are His people. He came as King of the Jews to save them. He brought the kingdom of God to them. He is the Messiah, and they say to Him, “You’ve got a demon.” The opposition and accusations came to a sharp conclusion in this passage when Jesus replied, “I do not have a demon...I am God.” Those who were listening to these words picked up stones to kill Jesus. They were going to stone Him because in Leviticus 24 that is the capital punishment for blasphemy. Their reaction to stone Jesus was built around the statement in John 8:51, “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”

What did Jesus mean when He said, “He will never see death?” Jesus meant that if you keep His words, believe what He said, embrace what He said, and treasure His words as your greatest value, you will not see death. As we read through the four Gospels, we know how it ends. We know Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. We know that He is the Resurrection and the Life. We know that He is the Bread of Life. We know that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. We know that He came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world so that we would not pay the penalty of death for our sin. As believers in Jesus, we have already passed from death to life. We have eternal life through Jesus Christ. We will not see death.

The Jews continued to mock Jesus, concluding in verse 57, “You are not yet 50 years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Their opposition to Him draws out the deity of Jesus Christ. They pick up stones to kill Him at the point when He says, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” They knew this from Exodus 3:13-14 when Moses asked God who it was that sent him: “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. Say to them, I AM has sent you.’” Jesus made it clear to them that He is God. That He is Yahweh, “The Great I Am.” He has authority over death, and through Jesus we have the hope of eternal life.

As believers in Jesus, fear of death does not haunt us. If we keep His Word we will not see death. Thanks be to God!

PRAY

God, we thank You for sending Jesus to remove the sting of death. In Him we have victory over sin and death. In Jesus, we have eternal life through His redeeming death on the cross. Forgive us when our faith is weak, and give us strength to claim Your promises that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Amen.
Tuesday, March 9

BLIND BUT NOW I SEE

John 9:1-41

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

John 9:3

REFLECT

Jesus performed many miracles during His time on earth. Today’s Scripture reading is about Jesus healing a man who was born blind. In those times, people thought ailments were a result of a great sin. The disciples asked Jesus if the man or his parents had sinned. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life” (v. 3).

Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with His saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. Jesus told the man to wash it off in the Pool of Siloam. When the man did, he was able to see. Everyone questioned this miracle and asked who had performed it. The Pharisees refused to believe that a man who was sent by God would perform work on the Sabbath. They even questioned the blind man’s parents, who would not answer and directed them to their son instead. They feared the Jews because anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue (v. 22). The blind man’s parents missed their opportunity to share this miracle with the Jews and the rest of the world.

The blind man was asked by Jesus if he believed in the Son of Man. The man wanted to know who the Son of Man was so that he could believe in Him. Jesus answered, “You have now seen him, in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” The man believed and worshipped Him (vv. 35-38). Jesus used this man’s suffering and ultimate healing to teach the man and others about faith and glorifying God who is able to do all things.

Have you ever experienced a hardship, illness, or a life-changing event? Did you pray for God’s healing? When He answered your prayers, did you share with others about what God had done for you? While I wouldn’t wish a recent diagnosis that I received on anyone, it has given me an opportunity to share my faith with others. It has been a blessing to see the strength and courage that God has given me. My illness put me in a position to share my faith and encourage others and let them know what God has done for me.

You don’t have to have all the answers to share your story. We are here now to lead others to Christ so that everyone can experience salvation. Trust your words and your story to lead others to Him.

PRAY

Dear Lord, thank You for helping us see that You use all things to lead others to You. Help us to see Your blessings, even in times of trouble. We ask that our lives and stories be used to share the message of salvation with others. Amen.

Denise Bivin

Denise and her husband, David, have been Dawson members for 28 years. Denise has been active in many ministries, including The Spirit of Luke (Dawson’s Black Belt ministry), teaching a 3rd grade Life Group, and numerous other projects. Denise and David have two adult children, Jake and Carley.
Healing The Blind Man
THE GOOD SHEPHERD
John 10:1-21

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

John 10:14-15

REFLECT

When Jesus spoke this parable to the Pharisees, He was not thought of in the same way that we think of Him today. Though we know Jesus as the perfect Son of God, during His time on earth, people thought of Him as a prophet, heretic, or madman. The Pharisees were among those who did not believe that Jesus was all He claimed to be. As they would later find out, they were wrong. In John 10, Jesus told them a parable about a shepherd and his sheep. The initial parable is presented in verses 1-4, but the Pharisees did not grasp the message. In subsequent verses, Jesus further illustrated what a true good shepherd looks like. The imagery that He used was extremely simple, yet unbelievably profound.

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is our only path to eternal life. In verse 9, He said, “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” This verse sounds rather similar to John 14:6, one of the most beloved verses in the Bible: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

In these chaotic times, it is natural to feel lost, vulnerable, and afraid. We are sheep; without our shepherd, we are nothing but wanderers. Jesus is the Good Shepherd: He fights for us, and He died for us. However, the story does not end there. Not only is our Savior willing to lay down His life for His sheep, but He wants an intimate relationship with each and every one of us. In verses 14 and 15, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Jesus wants a relationship with us that is as deep and personal as the one that He has with His Father. It would be impossible to overstate the magnitude of this privilege, as the Son of God desires to know us on an intimate level. This love is unattainable through human efforts, and there is just a single way that we can obtain it. By accepting Jesus into our lives as our Lord and Savior, we are also saying yes to a profound fellowship with the Creator of the universe, our Good Shepherd.

PRAY

Lord, thank You for being our Good Shepherd. We could never do anything to deserve Your love, yet You freely give it anyway. Thank You for this gift. Inspire us and equip us to share it with all of Your children. Amen.

Dawson Wade
Dawson has been attending Dawson since the time he was born, and during high school he was very active in Student Ministry and Chapel Choir. With his wife, Mary Tate, he looks forward to becoming more involved in Dawson.
In his Keeping
Thursday, March 11

KNOWN BY THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:22-42

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

John 10:27-28

REFLECT

Since my father passed away in October, I have found great comfort in replaying old voicemail messages that he left me. Just hearing his lead in, “My Dear Brooke,” conjures an image of him sitting in his favorite chair talking with me about the plan of the day. The familiarity of his voice reminds me of a lifetime of memories filled with his advice, care, and encouragement. Some days replaying his messages make me laugh, and on other days I cry, but the messages always fill me with gratitude that I was loved by a wonderful earthly father.

John 10:27-28 reveals that the strong connection I had with my earthly father was just a tiny glimpse of the relationship my Heavenly Father desires to have with all of His children. As Jesus faced the unbelief of the Jews at the temple, their attempt to trap Him reveals that they are not His sheep. Jesus made this clear by describing His sheep whom He knows, loves, and will ultimately save.

- “My sheep listen to my voice. I know them.” God’s sheep recognize His voice because they have an intimate relationship with Him, value both His Word and authority, and trust His character.
- “They follow me.” God’s sheep cheerfully obey His commands and follow His guidance because they believe that in all circumstances, He is working all things together for their good, and therefore His paths are always best.
- “I give them eternal life.” God’s sheep are promised the priceless, unearned reward of abundant life, both presently on earth and forever in Heaven, paid for by Christ’s death on the cross.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and invites each of us to abandon the unbelief of the Jews at the temple and become one of His sheep.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for calling us Your children and loving us like a good shepherd cares for his sheep. We want to faithfully spend time in Your presence and in Your Word so that we will recognize Your voice as You tenderly lead us to navigate the hardships of this world. Help us cheerfully follow Your commands so that our worship of You and our ministry to others will grow to be more like Christ’s example each day. We are humbled by Your grace. We love You and we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brooke Gibson

Brooke Gibson grew up at Dawson and has served as Dawson’s Minister to Preschoolers since 2008. Brooke is married to Darrell, and mom to Shae, Hannah, and Farrah, and a new grandmother to Weston.
So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

John 11:16

REFLECT

I am a very literal person, and so the Book of John has always challenged me. From the very first sentence, John uses a lot of symbolism and allegory. The other three Gospels are similar in content and style, but the Gospel of John is so different.

The story of Lazarus is a perfect example. Jesus received the news of a serious illness of a close friend, yet took no action for three days. Why did He delay? Jesus revealed that the reason for His delay was “for the glory of God.” I’ve often wondered that if it was for God’s glory, why not go immediately? You really need to know the end of the story to understand why the delay was critical to demonstrating “God’s glory.”

Jesus was literal with His disciples and told them plainly that Lazarus was dead and that He was glad that He had not been there so that they would believe. If you’re like me then you’ve probably struggled to understand God’s plan or see how our life events are for “God’s glory.” We wonder why there is suffering, sickness, injury, or death for our loved ones. How could a lost job, or car crash, or even a bad grade be a part of God’s plan? The answer is that we have to trust God; we must believe—but it’s far easier to say than to do.

“For the glory of God” answers another curious question in the story of Lazarus. Going to Judea at this time in the story was a very dangerous trip. Why would Jesus risk His life, His ministry, and the lives of His disciples? His disciples were clearly worried. Jesus responded by telling them that that if a man walks in the daytime he will not stumble but if he walks “by night” he would stumble because he “has no light” (vv. 9-10).

What could Jesus possibly have meant? Why would walking in the daylight help them avoid a stoning? The answer, again, is that the disciples needed to trust God’s plan. If they followed God’s plan (the light), they would not stumble. God’s plan is always for His glory.

I love the irony in verse 16 because it is “doubting” Thomas who spoke up and told the other disciples that they all should go. Thomas trusted God’s plan; he believed without fully understanding. Like Thomas, we should all say, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (v. 16).

PRAY

Father, help us to trust Your plan. Help us to believe that all things work for Your glory. Help us to believe that You are in control, even when we cannot see the light in the darkest times. Help us not to fear difficult tasks. Help us not to worry. Help us to remember at all times that You love us. Amen.
PSALM 27

1 The L ORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The L ORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evil doers assail me to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.

4 One thing have I asked of the L ORD, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the L ORD all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the L ORD and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around
me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the L ORD.

7 Hear, O L ORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!

8 You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you,
“Your face, L ORD, do I seek.”

9 Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!

10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the L ORD will take me in.

11 Teach me your way, O L ORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

12 Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they breathe out violence.

13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the L ORD
in the land of the living!

14 Wait for the L ORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the L ORD!
GOD IS NEVER LATE
John 11:17-57

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

REFLECT

Lord give me patience...right now!

I wonder how many of us have prayed a similar prayer? John 11 contains the fifth “I am” statement made by Jesus and the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. One of the most intriguing aspects of the story of Lazarus is Jesus’ delay in going to Bethany once He heard that His friend was sick.

Can you feel Lazarus’ sisters’ impatience building as they waited for Jesus? They had sent word to the very One they knew could heal their brother, yet no Jesus. Lazarus died. No Jesus. The first day passed. No Jesus. The second day passed. No Jesus. The third day passed. Still no Jesus. John 11:17 tells us that Jesus arrived outside of Bethany on the fourth day after Lazarus’ death.

Was Jesus late? Did He even care? Martha and Mary had wanted their brother healed four days ago. Now he was dead. Lazarus’ sisters sounded as if they thought Jesus was late, as both sisters basically made the same statement to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

How many times have we urgently petitioned God, only to hear silence? We need to understand that God is always on His divine timetable, not ours, and He in fact, is never late. God’s perceived delay is often for His glory. In John 11, Jesus’ perfect timing brought a greater miracle than the healing of Lazarus. He raised him from the dead. I wonder if that thought ever entered the two sisters’ stressed minds? Likewise, does God’s purpose ever enter our minds when we petition Him?

When Jesus called to Lazarus, “come out,” God’s power over death was on full display. I bet Mary and Martha remembered Jesus’ words about being the “resurrection and the life” (vv. 25-26) as soon as their brother exited that tomb.

During this Lenten season, may we seek to be more patient with God and follow Him more diligently. God is always at work, on His timetable, for His glory.

PRAY

Lord, please give us patience. Give us confidence with Your timetable and plan for our lives. Help us to increase our faith in Your perfect will during our times of stress. Thank You for being a God who is never late. We love You. Amen.

Kirk Flowers
Kirk is married to Tammy and has been a Dawson member since 1983. He has served on many churchwide committees and has also served as a Deacon. One of Kirk’s greatest joys is teaching Young Married Adult Life Groups.
HOLDING SPACE FOR THE COMING KING

John 12:1-19

And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

John 12:14-15

REFLECT

Today, take some time to read John 12:1-19. Read it, pause, pray, then read it again. There is much that happens in this passage, yet, what continues to stand out is the need to slow down. To pause and be with Jesus. At the close of John 11, Jesus retreated with the disciples. Meanwhile, the chief priests and the Pharisees issued a warrant for His arrest. Upon Jesus’ return to Bethany six days before the Passover, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus welcomed Jesus to sit at their table. They served Him and expressed their praise and thanksgiving.

It is at this dinner that we are given two differing responses to Jesus’ presence, the first being from Mary. Mary approached Jesus in complete adoration. She then took her perfume, the most valuable thing she probably had, and anointed Jesus’ feet using her hair. Mary, in full and complete devotion, recognized the importance and significance of this moment. She was moved by complete humility and love towards Jesus. Mary was most concerned with loving Jesus and being with Him.

This is starkly different from the second response that came from Judas, who missed out on the opportunity to praise Jesus. Mary was driven by love and adoration of Jesus, while Judas was blinded by money and likely driven by power, control, and status. One gives life while the other suffocates it. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the disciples slowly realized all that was truly taking place. They should have learned from Mary’s response of slowing down and being still in the moment as Jesus entered Jerusalem as a humble king, riding on a donkey.

During this Lenten season, I encourage you to take extra time to be with Jesus and reflect on all that happened right before the disciples’ eyes on that first Palm Sunday. Learn from Mary and ask yourself what motivates you: a love and adoration of Jesus, or a desire to maintain your status before the kings of the world?

PRAY

Father, may we be found as Mary, offering up our very best before You in complete adoration. Pausing before You to simply be with You. May we not give into temptation to speed by these days and miss the gift of sitting before You in adoration and complete devotion to You. Amen.
DECIDING TIME
John 12:20-50

“All those who want to be my disciples must come and follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And if they follow me, the Father will honor them.”

John 12:26

REFLECT

Earlier in this chapter, the crowds had followed Jesus on His way back to Bethany to stay with His friends (v. 9). The next day, another large crowd threw palm branches in the streets as Jesus entered Jerusalem (vv. 12-13). There was a lot of excitement in the air and it was palpable. Is there any wonder that a couple of guys from out of town wanted to meet the person at the center of the hubbub? Together, they approached Philip to ask for an introduction, a request Philip (and Andrew) then relayed to Jesus (vv. 21-22).

What was Jesus’ response? It was one that was probably very unexpected. Jesus told them about kernels of wheat that had to die in order to bear fruit. He also said that if a person loved his life, he would lose it, but if he hated his life, he would keep it for all of eternity (vv. 24-25).

Jesus had a lot on His mind because He knew His time was near, yet He was still teaching those who would listen. He told them that “All those who wanted to be His disciples must come and follow Him, because His servants must be wherever He was. And if they followed Him, the Father would honor them” (v. 25).

Can you imagine what Philip and Andrew must have thought? Jesus responded to an apparent request for a casual introduction by explaining that the time for such meetings had passed. From that point forward, those who wanted to be in Jesus’ circle would have to choose. They must go with Him and serve Him—or choose a different path. It was now deciding time. We aren’t told what the curious Greeks did. Would they “despise their life in this world” and go with Jesus?

At the end of this passage, Jesus explained that He came to save the world so that the world would not remain in darkness. God, the Father, who had sent Jesus to fulfill this purpose, gave Him the words to say and the authority to speak them. On the “last day,” all who rejected Jesus will be judged by those same words.

What about you? If you are have yet to become a follower of Jesus, the time to decide is right now. What will you choose?

PRAY

Jesus, thank You for taking sinners like us and making us clean and giving us the opportunity to go with You and serve You. Help us to embrace You and the everlasting life You bring even when—like Your disciples at the time of this story—we don’t know what is about to happen next. Amen.

Melissa Atwood
Melissa has been a Dawson member for 4 years. She is an active member of her Life Group, as well as her Tuesday Night Bible Study Group. Melissa lives in the Birmingham area with her two fur babies and works in the public service sector.
Wednesday, March 17

OUR SERVANT-HEARTED SAVIOR

John 13:1-20

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

John 13:3-4

REFLECT

At the beginning of the Feast of the Passover festivities, Jesus and His disciples made their way to Jerusalem to celebrate. They gathered together for one final meal which is known as “The Last Supper.” Then just as the dinner began, Jesus Christ, the One True Son of God, took off His garments and proceeded to do the unimaginable. He began, one by one, washing His disciples’ feet. He was performing the work of the lowliest of servants. This is a glorious picture of God’s heart for servant-minded ministry. On the brink of His crucifixion, the Savior of the world humbled Himself enough to take up a towel and basin and wash the dirty feet of His followers.

When Jesus reached Peter, he asked, “Are you washing my feet?” Jesus responded with an answer of patience and grace. Peter did not understand what His Master was doing, but He would soon enough. Jesus then mentioned how He was “cleansing” His disciples “completely.” Although, there was one who was not clean. Jesus knew who would betray Him even then. He knew Judas Iscariot would turn away from his Teacher and Savior.

Our Savior then took center stage, put His outer garments back on, and introduced to His twelve disciples the concept of being servant-hearted to one another. His example illustrated that no person is greater than another.

As His followers, we can take this Scripture and apply it to our own lives. We know that when Jesus Christ washes away our sins with His cleansing blood, it is permanent and complete. We know that in order to be like Christ, we need to have servant-like hearts toward our peers. What a beautiful portrait of grace. Our Savior, the One who took away all of our sins on that cursed tree, is a washer of feet.

PRAY

Dear God, help us to see the mighty work of Your hands in our everyday lives. You are the Most High God. We, Your humble servants, are sinners, but we cling to the promise of the Gospel. Thank You for sending Your only Son, Jesus, to die for us, a true servant-hearted Savior. Amen.

Cole Frier

Cole is a Senior at Samford, and will start seminary to pursue a Master of Divinity degree in the fall. He currently serves as the Dawson College Ministry BETA Intern.
PUTTING ON NEW GLASSES

John 13:21-38

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

REFLECT

Putting on a new pair of much-needed glasses can be a strange experience. Fine print snaps into focus, trees suddenly have a multitude of leaves, and colors are more vivid. Your perspective changes completely, and in ways that would be hard to describe before putting on the glasses.

During their last meal together, Jesus tried to prepare His disciples for something they could not yet comprehend: His death, His resurrection, and their lives without Him on earth. John recorded Jesus’ words as He made a final attempt to explain His purpose to His faithful students. He even reviewed an ancient, easily quoted commandment from Leviticus 19: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

But Jesus changed it, and told them so by pointing out this commandment is new—not new as in original, but new as in improved: “just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” At this point in their history, the disciples easily saw how well Jesus loved them and had been through three years of patient teaching.

However, there is a depth to His love they had not yet seen. They didn’t yet understand how Jesus was loving Judas while He watched him leave to betray Jesus. They do not see how He loved Peter, knowing that his denial of his teacher was just hours away. They could not yet imagine the torture and horrific death Jesus would soon endure, because of His love for them and for all of sinful humanity.

Loving your neighbor as yourself was a small task when compared to loving each other as the Savior of the world has loved others. The disciples thought they knew how well Jesus loved them, but the sacrifice of God’s Lamb gave them a new pair of much-needed glasses. In hindsight, His new commandment would call them to love each other regardless of offenses, in spite of betrayals, and with a willingness to sacrifice themselves. Do we love each other as Jesus has loved?

PRAY

God, please help us see others through Your eyes and move our hearts to love them as You love us. Amen.
Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

*John 14:6-7*

**REFLECT**

We often find these farewell words from Jesus to His disciples to be simultaneously concerning and comforting. In verse 1, Jesus attempted to reassure His confused and concerned disciples. No wonder they were troubled. They had been told that their Teacher was going to a place that they could not go. Perhaps the best way to learn from this passage is to examine the responses of Thomas and Philip.

Some of us relate to Thomas in that we are looking for a literal meaning to Jesus’ words. Thomas was saying, “Look, Jesus, we actually don’t know where you are going. Please tell us the place, and quickly, for we don’t have much time.” Thomas is troubled by the fear of being left by the one that he had followed for years. We often find ourselves getting caught up in the same struggle. We want a road map to where Jesus is leading us, but miss that Jesus Himself is our road map.

In verse 6, Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This statement from Jesus is a promise to His disciples (and to us) that He has always been and will always be all that they need.

Jesus went on to say, “If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him” (v. 7). This time, it’s Philip who doubts. With possibly a hint of exasperation in His voice, Jesus explained that the Father has been with Philip the whole time they were together, since Jesus was both fully God and fully man.

The point of Jesus’ whole mission on earth was to make God known. The works and words of Jesus mirrored the attributes of God and showed who God is. In the final verses of this passage, Jesus entrusted His mission to the disciples and also to us. As followers of Jesus, we are to use Him as our guide to make God and His kingdom known to all.

**PRAY**

Heavenly Father, thank You for the assurance that You are preparing a place for us, and that one day You will return to take us with You. Lord, help us to overcome the same fear and doubt that Thomas and Philip felt. Give us courage to allow You to be our guide as we walk with You and share the good news of Your second coming. Amen.
19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the L ORD.

20 This is the gate of the L ORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

23 This is the L ORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 This is the day that the L ORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

25 Save us, we pray, O L ORD! O L ORD, we pray, give us success!

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the L ORD! We bless you from the house of the L ORD.

27 The L ORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!

28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you.

29 Oh give thanks to the L ORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!
A LOVE FOR JESUS

John 14:15-31

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

John 14:15

REFLECT

Throughout our lives we hear of God’s love for us, His people. But what does it mean to really love Jesus? As we read in John 14:15-31, Jesus told His disciples that love for Him is to be in a way that results in the keeping of Jesus’ commandments, His Word.

Loving Jesus is not the same as keeping His commandments. Keeping His Word is the result of loving Him, not the same as loving Him. Doing the right thing is good, but the reason behind doing it has greater depth and value.

So, what is this love for Jesus that gives rise to and results in the keeping of the commandments of Jesus? Jesus has no flaws. He has no sin. Because of this, we cannot love him, the way God loves us. We cannot love Him as we do others with a love that has to overcome some flaw or fault. No. Love for Jesus is 100% deserved. He, being faultless and flawless, is immeasurably worthy of being loved. We love Him, not for who He is, but because of all that He is.

Love for Jesus is a response. It is a response to understanding or experiencing of who He is. This also means that love for Jesus is fulfilling. It’s desiring Him because He is desirable. It’s admiring Him because He is admirable. It’s treasuring Him because of His great value. It’s enjoying Him because He is enjoyable. It’s being completely satisfied with all that He is! It’s the yearning and need of our souls to all that is true and good and beautiful, found only in Jesus.

Loving Jesus is not a matter of us doing excellent things. It’s a matter of finding delight in an excellent Savior. Jesus says doing excellent things is the result of delighting in the excellent Savior. “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.” Let us love Jesus and find our delight in Him!

PRAY

Gracious heavenly Father, understanding love is not always easy for us. As we reflect on who You are, all that You have done, all that You are doing, may we discover a love for You that leads us to admiring, treasuring, and delighting simply in You. Bend, mold, and shape us towards a greater understanding of Your love for us and what it means to love You. Amen.

Andy Cartee

Andy has served on the Dawson ministry staff for nine years. Having led the Young Adult ministry and College ministry in previous years, Andy currently serves as the Minister of Recreation. Andy and his wife, Keri, are parents to Caleb and Chloe.
JESUS, THE TRUE VINE
John 15:1-17

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”

John 15:1-2

REFLECT

In John 15:1-2, a believer of Jesus is likened to a branch that receives its nourishment from the Living Vine, Jesus Christ. When we abide in Jesus, He produces fruit through us. However, many times we allow things in our own lives to diminish our impact for His kingdom. When that happens, God prunes all of the extraneous things that are hindering us so we will be free to bear a better harvest.

Every believer plays a significant role in God’s kingdom. God appointed us to go and bear fruit, but the only way we can fulfill this role is if we allow Jesus to live in us and through us, because apart from Him, we can do nothing.

There are three self-examination questions in this passage:

- “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11). The Word of God, living and growing within us, produces lasting and increasing joy. He wants each of us to fulfill the particular purpose He created us for. God commands us to love one another. Does Jesus’ joy shine through your life?

- “Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). What a friend we have in Jesus. He loves us just the way we are. He knows everything about us and still accepts us completely. He laid His life down for us on the cross so we could be redeemed and have an intimate relationship with Him. He wants us to build a relationship with Him as His friends, loving and fellowshipping with Him and knowing His heart. How can you walk in deeper fellowship with Jesus?


PRAY

Most gracious God, we thank You for Jesus Christ the True Vine. Help us to delight in bearing the fruits of love, which are our true purpose and joy. We ask that You discipline and train our wandering tendrils, prune our unfruitful branches, and cut away our diseased ones. Teach us to love one another. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Shirley Wilson
Shirley has recently retired from UAB School of Education and now has time to share with her four-year-old niece and six-year-old nephew. She is involved in several ministries at the church including the Adult Special Education Ministry, The Learning Center, and weekly Bible Studies to name a few.
WHEN THE WORLD HATES YOU

John 15:18-27

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

John 15:18-19

REFLECT

Jesus continued His Farewell Discourse with a jarring contrast. He followed a beautifully moving portrait of love and friendship in the first half of John 15 with a warning of worldly hatred, delivered in logical terms. With a series of “if...then” statements, Jesus explained this spiritual truth with formulaic consistency: when the world encounters righteousness, it responds with hatred. “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

This isn’t a new phenomenon unique to the disciples; it’s an eternal truth, as shown by Jesus’ reference to the Psalms: “But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” As John reflects on Jesus’ teaching in 1 John 3:12-13, he goes further back to Cain’s murder of his brother Abel: “And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. So as followers of Christ we should expect hatred to come; but how should we respond in its face?”

We should not respond with fear. We are given two comforts in this passage. First, the comfort of knowing that Christ endured and overcame immense hatred long before we would ever have to face any ourselves (v. 18). Second, the promise that the same power by which Christ endured the world’s hatred is given to us through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit speaks on our behalf as we bear witness to Christ (v. 27).

Nor should we respond with equal and opposite hatred. Satan eagerly exploits our sense of injustice for being hated without cause, heightening the temptation to respond in kind. But by doing so, we lose the benefit of the righteousness applied to us and succumb to the “sin crouching at the door” (Genesis 4:7).

Instead, as believers called by Jesus Christ to bear fruit that abides (v. 16), we respond to the world’s hatred with abiding love (v. 17); with the joy that accompanies our sanctification (James 1:2); and peace with all men, as far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18).

PRAY

Lord, help us to not be fearful of the world’s hatred, but instead to relish the chance to show the world Your abiding love. Thank You for empowering us to do so with the Fruit of Your Spirit. Amen.

Tuesday, March 23

Hudson Williams

Hudson and his wife Emily have two children, Jack and Hazel. They have been members of Dawson since they moved to Birmingham in 2015 and currently serve as investors to a 3rd Grade Life Group.
THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 16:1-16

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

John 16:12-14

REFLECT

Towards the end of Jesus’ ministry on earth, He was with His disciples and warned them of the persecution that would come. He told them where, when, and why He would go, but He assured them that He would not leave them alone because the Holy Spirit would come.

In this passage, we see that it was very important for the disciples to understand the time of transition between Jesus’ departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, Jesus also wanted His disciples to understand the work of the Holy Spirit, who would convict the world of sin and lead people to repentance, and who would reveal the justice of God to all who believe. Jesus explained to them that the Holy Spirit would tell the disciples the things to come, the nature of their mission, and the opposition they would face.

Before ending His ministry on earth and returning to Heaven, the Lord Jesus did not leave His disciples alone to walk on their own account. Neither does He leave us alone. Jesus knew that it was necessary for His disciples, past and present, to have a guide, a Comforter to continue with the agenda of God’s redemptive plan. Thus He announced the coming of the Holy Spirit: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

Jesus instructed His early disciples to be His witnesses to people of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20), but they had to wait until the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today, we know that that promise had already been fulfilled (Acts 2). Therefore, all believers in Christ are equipped with the Spirit’s power and challenged to fulfill Jesus’ command to preach the gospel to all nations.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege You give us to be bearers of the message of salvation to those who do not know You. Thank You for equipping us with the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this task. We pray that You will find us faithful before You. Amen.

Bayron Mosquera

Bayron has served as Dawson’s Hispanic Pastor for 26 years. He and his wife, Maria, have two grown children, Evelyn, who is married, and Byron Jr. The family has recently celebrated the arrival of new grandson, Benjamin James (Benji).
“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

**John 16:33**

**REFLECT**

As someone who loves words, reading, (and talking!), and whose profession is dedicated to helping others communicate, this passage of Scripture really speaks to me. I love figurative language. In daily speech or in the greatest works of literature, figures of speech create word pictures for us and help messages to come alive.

Jesus used figurative language when He told parables. He also used similes, metaphors, and imagery to teach real truths. In our Scripture passage today, Jesus openly explained that He was using figurative speech with His disciples. Jesus then verbally acknowledged that He realized that His disciples were confused. He assured them that, “The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father” (John 16:25).

The disciples are clearly ecstatic. They announce: “Now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God” (John 16:29-30).

But, did they really understand? At this point in Jesus’ ministry, His disciples were still envisioning an earthly king, a political leader. Even as Jesus spoke as clearly as He could (“Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me”)—a truth that we, on this side of the cross, can understand—His disciples still could not grasp what He told them.

In contrast, we have the Bible, which is God’s Word. We have the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, right in front of us. Whether explicitly stated (I am the Christ) or full of imagery (I am the Living Water), the holy Word of God is available to us at our fingertips. If we want to know Him, if we want to grow closer to Him, we don’t have to hold our questions in or wonder as the disciples did. We only have to seek Him in His Word. As we do this, the Holy Spirit will open our eyes and hearts to know Him better.

The disciples didn’t know what was ahead of them. Nor do we. However, we do know because Jesus assures us clearly: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). He, literally, not figuratively, is our source for hope, peace, and joy.

**PRAY**

Father, thank You for the assurance that You give us peace, and though we face difficulties and life is not easy, You have overcome the world. Help us turn to Your Word and hold Your words close. We know that you are in control. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen
“And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”

John 17:11

REFLECT
This passage has been called the High Priestly Prayer or the Farewell Prayer and is the longest prayer of Jesus found in the Bible. It has also been identified as Christ’s prayer for us.

Jesus began the prayer declaring His time had come (v. 1). He described where He and the disciples had been on the journey and how they had reached this time. Jesus knew what was going to occur in the next days. He knew He was about to leave His disciples and His followers, and He worked to prepare them. He knew it would be confusing and frightening and that it would leave them disappointed and hopeless. They could only see what they were losing and did not yet understand what God was providing. I often respond the same way in the midst of crisis.

What lay ahead was the completion of Jesus’ earthly ministry and the salvation of all who believed in Him then and for all future believers, which includes us. The most loving part of the prayer, it seems to me, is Jesus’ request that the Father “keep them” and “protect them” (v. 11, v. 15).

There are many things Jesus prayed for regarding His followers. But asking the Father to keep us and protect us says it all. It seems to imply not only possession but proximity. I love the assurance that we are “kept” in God’s heart and in His hands. What can harm us if we remain there daily?

When Jesus knew that His time had come, what He prayed for most earnestly was that we would stay close to the Father by being in His presence every day, kept and protected by God’s amazing and unlimited love.

PRAY
Gracious Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that we belong to You. We pray that You keep us and protect us this day and every day. In days of uncertainty, please remind us again of the certainty of Your love and care for us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Rodney Nolen
Rodney and his wife, Kathy, have been members of Dawson since the early 1970s. Rodney has served as a five-year-old Life Group teacher and is currently serving as a Deacon, and Kathy is a member of the Sanctuary Choir.
PSALM 51:1-17

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

14 Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he."

John 18:4-5a

**REFLECT**

Today’s Scripture marks a turning point for Jesus and His disciples. The private ministry of our Lord with His disciples was transitioning to the public drama of redemption for humanity. Perhaps the best way to see the truths of this passage is to pay attention to the symbolism that is involved. There are four symbols in this section:

**THE GARDEN:** The Kidron Valley is located east of Jerusalem between the city wall and the Mount of Olives. Jesus often went to the garden with His disciples to rest, meditate, and pray. Human history began in a garden (Genesis 2:8), and the first sin of man was committed in that garden. Eden was the garden of disobedience and sin; Gethsemane was the garden of obedience and submission.

**THE KISS:** Jesus was in full control. He knew what would happen. Judas expected some kind of deception, so He arranged to identify Jesus by kissing Him. But Jesus shocked both Judas and the arresting officers by boldly presenting Himself to them. He had nothing to fear and nothing to hide. He would willingly lay down His life for His sheep. Furthermore by surrendering to the officers, Jesus helped to protect His disciples.

**THE SWORD:** All of the disciples had courageously affirmed their devotion to Christ. Peter decided to prove it, so He quickly drew out a small sword and started to fight. Peter’s sword symbolizes rebellion against the will of God. Jesus did not need Peter’s protection. He could have summoned legions of angels had He wanted to be delivered. Luke tells us that Jesus healed Malchus’ ear; an act of grace on His part.

**THE CUP:** Peter had a sword in his hand, but Jesus had a cup in His. Peter was resisting God’s will, but the Savior was accepting it. Earlier Jesus had prayed, “O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” In the garden that night you would find both guilt and grace. Peter was guilty of resisting God’s will; Judas was guilty of the most basic kind of treachery. The mob was guilty of rejecting the Son of God and treating Him as though He were the lowest kind of criminal.

But Jesus was gracious. He crossed the Kidron Valley, fully conscious that Judas was betraying Him. He went into the garden of Gethsemane totally surrendered to His Father’s will. He healed Malchus’ ear. He protected His disciples. He yielded Himself into the hands of sinners that He might suffer and die for us,

**PRAY**

“Love so amazing, so divine. Demands my soul, my life, my all.” Amen.

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**Bob Hatfield**
Bob served for 35 years as Minister of Music at Dawson with his wife, Polly, serving faithfully beside him. Their children, Kim and Rob, were both baptized at Dawson and were active in its ministries.
Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.

**John 18:15-16**

**REFLECT**

In this passage, we most often focus on Jesus or Peter; however, standing quietly by is John, “the other disciple.” Just prior to this account, John had shared the Last Supper with Jesus and the disciples and had been taught by Jesus. John witnessed Jesus pray that God would “take this cup” from Him and heard Him submit to God saying, “yet not my will, but yours be done.” John then followed as Jesus was arrested and taken to Annas. Because he was known by the high priest, John was allowed to accompany Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard.

In the courtyard, John heard Jesus questioned and saw Him slapped in the face. Standing there, John did not deny being a disciple of Jesus, but neither did he come to Jesus’s defense.

We don’t know what was going through John’s mind as God’s plan unfolded, but we do know that he followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, and that he was still following Jesus as He went to the cross (John 19:25-27). John must have been terrified, heartbroken, and confused, searching his memory of Jesus’ teachings, trying to make sense of the events playing out before him.

How do we respond to the circumstances in our lives that don’t make sense, that rock our world and unsettle us? Do we distance ourselves from God, or do we, like John, walk closely with Jesus and reflect on His teachings? Do we ask God to take away the difficult things in life, but then pray “not my will, but yours be done”?

John did gain clarity following the resurrection once he saw the resurrected Christ and later when he received the Holy Spirit. As believers, we have the blessing of the Holy Spirit living within us and of the complete, inspired Word of God. We may not understand all that God is doing through the hardships of life, but we do know that He loves us and is working all things together for our good and His glory. May we, like John, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

**PRAY**

Father, thank You for Christ’s finished work on the cross, and for warning us that “in this world, we will have trouble.” We can live with hope knowing that You are sovereign and have overcome the world. Amen.

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**Rhonda Powell**

Rhonda and her husband, Tom, have been members of Dawson for 24 years. She co-teaches a Life Group for young married couples and serves on the Personnel Committee. Some of her meaningful experiences include Chapel Choir tour/mission trips and medical mission trips to Haiti.
STATICKY CHOICE
John 18:28-40

Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!”

John 18:37-40

REFLECT

A VHS tape would always arrive by mail just before Christmas. On the spine I would inevitably find the titles of several movies written in small caps. The movies had been recorded throughout the twelve months prior by my aunt, Ruby Ann, who would guess at what movies children enjoy, kindly pausing the recording to cut out the commercials.

The tape was always a little staticky, though, from being bootlegged off the television. Whereas going to the store and buying the original movies and then watching them would have been a crystal clear experience, the second-hand copy wasn’t as close to the original as you would like to think.

As Jesus is brought before the Roman leaders, Pilate, the governor of Judea, was confronted with a choice. On the one hand there was Jesus Christ: God in flesh, the Great I Am. On the other hand there was Barabbas, which in the original language means “son of a rabbi.” So, who did Pilate choose to pardon: the ultimate rabbi and Great High Priest, or the second-hand, distorted copy of a religious leader who had chosen popularity over godliness?

Pilate, like us, chose a facsimile of the original.
Pilate, like us, chose what is expedient, rather than what is true.
Pilate, like us, chose the wrong he knew, instead of the right to which he aspired.
Pilate, like us, chose Barabbas instead of Jesus.

Today we confess our choosing of anything other than Christ, and call it what it is: sin. Today, we play back the tape of our lives and recognize the many ways the static of sin has obscured the Truth in us. Today we return to the One who is the “True and Better Adam” (1 Corinthians 15).

PRAY

True God, who gave Yourself to us in Christ, give us the grace to reject the choices before us that are not You, so that we might know and follow Your example of love and sacrifice, both now and forevermore. Amen.

John Woods
John serves as the Music & Worship Pastor at Dawson alongside a team of other committed and passionate minister-musicians. He is married to Lindsay and dad to Hudson, Emma, and Mason.
GOD’S HAND IN ALL THINGS
John 19 1-16

Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

John 19:14-16

REFLECT
The events in our Scripture reading today bring us ever closer to Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins. Fear led Pilate to present Jesus to be crucified. He knew that Jesus was innocent, but he was more afraid of the angry mob and religious leaders than he was of listening to his conscience. In hopes of garnering sympathy for Jesus, he had Him scourged, beaten, and humiliated. He presented Jesus to the crowd wearing a crown of thorns and a royal robe.

Notice the time mentioned in the exchange between Pilate and the religious leaders regarding Jesus’ kingship. The reference to the middle of the day, the day of Preparation (v. 14), was when the Passover lambs would begin to be sacrificed in Jerusalem. This was mentioned to highlight the direct connection with Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Pilate’s words show not only his weakness but also the symbolism of this moment.

Pilate asked the Jewish leaders if they wanted him to crucify their King. John did not let the reader forget the sovereignty of Jesus. The Jewish leaders, by professing to acknowledge Caesar alone as their king, betrayed their heritage. God Himself was their King. Their cry also denied the Messianic expectations based on God’s promises in Scripture.

The crucifixion of Jesus was the most heinous evil ever done in the history of humankind. However, God brought the greatest good possible out of it—redemption, salvation, and the proclamation of His glory.

Because God always acts for our good and His glory, we can trust that He is working even in the most difficult circumstances we face. When our world seems out of control, He is always in control. When our world seems dark, He is the Light of life. When we are pushed to our limit, He is overflowing with provision and rest. Yes! Take comfort in this truth: God’s hand is at work in all things!

PRAY
Heavenly Father, thank You for what the Lord Jesus did for the whole world. Thank You for giving us faith in Him so that by faith in Him we are forgiven of our sins and eternally secure in Christ. May we never forget what Jesus did for all of us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Cynthia Smith
Cynthia has been a member of Dawson for more than 25 years. She, along with her husband Keith, daughters Sarah (26) and Julianna (21) were all baptized at Dawson. Cynthia helps serve dinner on Wednesday nights and serves on Sunday mornings with Dawson’s Student Ministry.
JESUS' COMPASSION IS GREATER
John 19:17-27

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

John 19:26-27

REFLECT

Occasionally, in our house, we have a “spirited debate” about the merits of watching live sporting events versus recording it and watching it later so that another event happening at the same time can be attended. I usually make the failed argument that knowing the outcome takes all the drama and excitement out of the result.

For some reason, reflecting on Jesus’ crucifixion never has the same result. I know the outcome: His resurrection is coming and death will be defeated, but reading through John’s account doesn’t lessen the sadness, drama, and emotion of the moment when Mary watched her son being put to death. Here was Jesus on the cross. An innocent man who was sentenced to the cruelest death of a criminal. In that time of vulnerability and humiliation, what did our Lord do? He sought after His mother’s welfare.

Apparently Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, had already passed away. Jesus, as the oldest son, would have been responsible for His mother’s care as a widow. The unnamed disciple in this passage is John. In spite of having other half-siblings, Jesus entrusts His mother’s care to John as He cries out to Mary, “Woman, behold, your son!” and to John, “Behold, your mother!” In other words, “John, I am dying. Take care of my mother like she is your own.” What a tender moment of care Jesus extended to someone close to Him, rather than thinking only of Himself in the midst of His suffering.

Jesus is no longer on the cross. Jesus now sits with God in Heaven, a position from which He rules in power and strength. If Jesus can show this tender care during a time of extreme vulnerability, how much more compassion can He show for His followers as He rules sovereignly over the earth from Heaven? During times of great grief and loss we can say with the hymn writer Isaac Watts:

| Under the shadow of thy throne | O God, our help in ages past, |
| Thy saints have dwelt secure;   | Our Hope for years to come, |
| Sufficient is Thine arm alone,  | Be Thou our guard while troubles last, |
| And our defense is sure.       | And our eternal home. |

PRAY

Holy Father, in the midst of His greatest suffering, Your Son modeled for us great compassion. Help us to be less focused on ourselves as we see suffering around us and display the compassion that Jesus shows from the cross. Amen.

Matt Adams
Matt and his wife Wendy have been members of Dawson for 12 years. They have two children, Davis and Tennery Kate. Matt teaches a High School Life Group and serves as a Deacon.
Jeanne Wear
Jeanne and her husband, Bill, have been members of Dawson for more than 50 years. Her favorite ways to serve are teaching a Senior Adult Life Group and singing in the Sanctuary and Dawsonaires choirs.

THE FINISHED WORK OF THE GOSPEL
John 19:28-37

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30

REFLECT

If I were a contestant on a game show called “Things That Are Never Finished,” I could come up with plenty of answers: the laundry, housework, meal preparation, bills to pay, projects around the house, and, of course, my ever growing to-do list. Whew! One thing I can count on every morning is that there will always be one more thing to do.

This list of never-ending tasks leads me to a mindset that sometimes can seep into my spiritual life. It can make it difficult for me to grasp the gift of John 19:30, which contains the last words spoken by Jesus on the cross, “It is finished.” His words compel me. I kneel at the foot of the cross and look up. He paid it all. I paid nothing.

“Behold the Man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders; ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life; I know that it is finished.”

“The Finished Work of the Gospel” is a favorite phrase of Pastor David, and one that I need to hear over and over. My Type A personality tries to lure me back to my to-do list and all I can accomplish. While my to-do list will never be finished, Jesus fully completed His earthly ministry on the cross. Everything His Father asked Him to do—finished! The work of my redemption and salvation—finished!

What’s left for me to do when it comes to my salvation? Nothing! This is the good news of the Gospel. I am saved by His grace alone. There is nothing I can do to prove or improve my standing with God.

It. Is. Finished.

PRAY

Thank You for the finished work of Jesus. Give us a daily understanding of Your words, “It is finished.” Remind us that we will never find true rest by crossing things off our to-do list, rather, teach us to rest in what You have done for us. Amen.
A BOLD AND LOVING MOVE
John 19:38-42

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pound in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

John 19:38-40

REFLECT

In John’s account of the burial of Jesus, we learn that Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked to take away the body of Jesus. Nicodemus, another secret disciple who had previously visited Jesus at night, brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, and together they bound Him in linen cloths with spices and laid Him in a new tomb. Both Joseph and Nicodemus were Jewish leaders who possessed wealth and prominence, but neither openly followed Jesus out of fear—fear of man, fear of death, and fear of losing position and posture until now.

Imagine the scene as the Pharisees falsely charged and crucified Jesus—mocking Him and treating Him like a criminal. The disciples fled in horror and disbelief, confused and wondering if their faith in Him was in vain. If Jesus were the Son of God, how could He die? If He really possessed divine power, why didn’t He remove Himself as the enemies were plotting His death? Joseph and Nicodemus surely had these same questions, doubts, and fears. Though He had no idea what God was doing, Joseph took a bold and faithful stand of love in asking for Jesus’s body. He had everything to lose, but with a heart of love, he buried his Lord with honor.

In our world today, we are tempted to believe that we could live our lives with more peace, obedience, and courage if we could see what God is doing. We all experience moments in life that do not make sense, and it can be tempting to question God’s power, goodness, wisdom, and love. If we lose sight of these attributes of God, we live in spiritual isolation, doubt, and fear.

Unlike Joseph and Nicodemus, we know that the burial of Jesus was not the end of the story! Those of us who believe in Jesus are encouraged by the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus as we observe the courage they displayed during such uncertainty. Likewise, we should respond with trust, courage, and obedience.

PRAY

Lord, we know that You have called us to be strong and courageous. You are willing to act in us and through us when we exercise courage of faith with hearts of love. Please show us how You are calling us to act for You. Amen.

Kimberly Triplett
Kimberly has been a member of Dawson for five years and is involved in the Petty/Cuenin Life Group and Dawson Preschool Ministry. She is a pharmacist at UAB Medicine and is one of the biggest sports fans you’ll ever meet!
Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

John 20:14-16
Mary Magdalene's first impression of the empty tomb was not unbridled joy. For her it was a sign of dashed hopes and unanswered questions. She must have initially wondered who would be so cruel to steal the body of her beloved rabbi. She mistook the resurrected Jesus for a gardener, hoping that maybe he held a clue to where the body of Jesus had been taken. It is only when He called her by name that she recognized that this was no common gardener but none other than the living Christ. There must have been something in the way that Jesus said her name that made her realize that her worst nightmare had been transformed into a reality that far exceeded her dreams and expectations.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's finale to his Lord of the Rings trilogy, The Return of the King, Samwise Gamgee greets the great wizard Gandalf with these words: “Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What’s happened to the world?” “A great Shadow has departed,” said Gandalf, and then he laughed and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land…”

Is everything sad going to come untrue? That is the question that the resurrection of Jesus answers with an everlasting YES! This is what Mary heard when Jesus called her by name. All of the sadness, confusion, and disappointment that she carried with her to the empty tomb were forever erased by Jesus addressing her by name.

There are certain voices that are so recognizable to us. We think of the deep bravado of James Earl Jones or closer to home we think of the familiar voices of those that we know deeply like a spouse, a child, or a parent. There is something that transcends just vocal recognition when someone we love calls our name. There is a deep, intimate connection.

When the resurrected Jesus called Mary by name, it was a foretaste of the reunion we will experience in Heaven. It meant for Mary that her heart that ached with grief and sadness was once and for all “coming untrue” at the sound of His voice.

One day, we will hear Him call our name. We long for that day because it means that our every ache in life will be eternally relieved. Our every disappointment and regret will forevermore be silenced. Every injustice will forever be made right. All of the tears of our earthly life will forever be wiped away at the sound of our Savior's voice.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Romans 15:13

Dr. David Eldridge
David is the Senior Pastor of the Dawson Family of Faith. He and his wife, Danielle, are the parents of Hayden, Luke, and Jonathan.
Do you Trust Me?