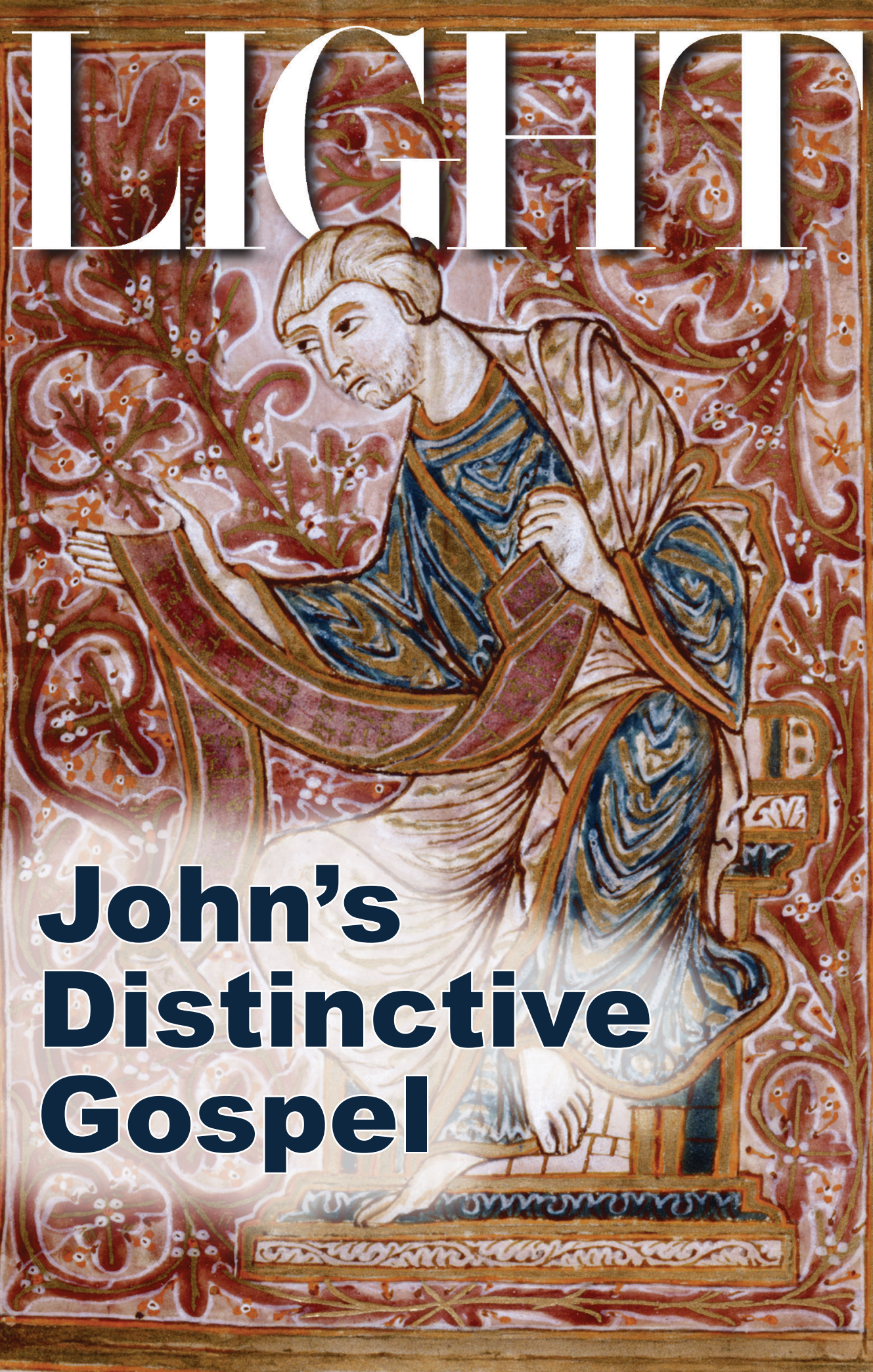




THE

John's Distinctive Gospel

CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial: The Beloved
- 10 Abiding in the Vine
- 18 Puzzle: The Lamb of God
- 19 Who Is John in Today's World?
- 28 Signs
- 35 How to Wait
- 42 Just a Little Talk With Jesus

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Editorial:

THE BELOVED



Are you the favorite child in your family? As the eldest and first grandchild, my siblings and cousins loudly proclaim that yes, I am the one who wears this crown. Would I ever want to put on my resume a moniker akin to “The Favorite” or “The Bossy Know-It-All”? Of course not. These seem quite brash and not entirely accurate. I can assure you I am not the favorite, nor am I bossy — well, at least not all the time. Even so, that title usually pops up when we’re all together for a family event.

My relatives’ labeling of me could be something along the lines of “she who didn’t destroy herself as a toddler,” or “extremely stubborn, like her mother and her father.” In a previous editorial, I shared my experience of breaking my nose twice. Before then, I pulled a heavy stereo speaker onto my forehead. Head wounds are very dramatic, and yes, I bear the mark and no memory of that unwise choice. My poor parents! I must have been sufficiently sturdy to give them confidence to bring my two siblings into the world.

The Gospel of John is the focus for this edition. If you’ve never read this New Testament book, you’ll quickly discover John has a nickname, but it’s not one given to him. Instead, we find several points where John refers to himself with terms we might deem bold and perhaps a bit presumptuous. Before we judge this book by the

author, however, let's consider why this writer chose the words he did.

FROM FAMILY LABELS TO SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

An overview of John yields several instances where the author refers to himself with these intimate terms. No other gospel writer is as bold as John in the following verses:

- "One of His disciples, the one Jesus loved, was at the table to the right of Jesus in a place of honor" (John 13:23, NET Bible). Not only was John in the room where the Last Supper took place, but he was also at the center of the action, reclining next to Jesus.
- "So when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing there, He said to His mother, 'Woman, look, here is your son!'" (John 19:26). John is present at the crucifixion, not hiding or in the mix of the crowd, but shoulder to shoulder with Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- "So she went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, 'They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'" (John 20:2). What follows is a footrace of sorts, where John is the first to reach the tomb and see the burial linen cloths.

Was John working to fulfil his mother's wish for himself and his brother James to be Jesus' right-hand men (Matthew 20:20-23)? Again, don't jump to conclusions.

These two are also known as the Boanerges, or "Sons of Thunder," as described by none other than Jesus; notably, this story is not found in the book of John. It's found in Mark 3 in the appointing of the Twelve: "To James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee, He gave the name Boanerges (that is, 'sons of thunder')" (Mark 3:17). This less-than-flattering nickname was possibly a reference to James and John's offering to call down fire from heaven and destroy a group of Samaritans who did not extend hospitality to Jesus and His disciples (Luke 9:51-56).

This has a clear tie-back to Elijah calling on God to consume the waterlogged sacrifice in his showdown with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. However, there's a striking contrast; Elijah wasn't being spicy, nor did he position himself as the catalyst for the fire-throwing. He put the matter before the Lord: "O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, prove today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and have done all these things at Your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that You, O LORD, are the true God and that You are winning back their allegiance" (1 Kings 18:36-37).

JOHN'S IDENTITY

Going back to the more favorable nickname of beloved, it's worth noting that John's Gospel also referred to others with terms of affection: "The sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, look, the one You love is sick.' When Jesus heard this, He said, 'This sickness will not lead to death, but to God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' (Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus)" (John 11:3-5).

This passage offers a valuable clue into why John referred to himself in this manner. When we read about Jesus' friendship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, we're shown glimpses of the deep connections they shared. This wasn't merely a social tie. Jesus also taught profound truths about Himself to His dear, open-hearted friends, as evidenced by Martha professing her faith, through tears, in John 11:24-27.

As the writer of a Gospel who includes so much of his own interactions with the Savior, John takes the opportunity to plant little signs about his identity as a child of God. This term, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," wasn't a humble brag; it was a declaration of John's intimate and personal relationship with his Savior.

As highlighted in this edition's essays, John shows boldness, loyalty, and courage by bearing witness at the crucifixion and preaching with

conviction about his risen Lord and Savior; consistency in displaying the miracles of Jesus as “signs;” deep theological understanding in describing Jesus’ divine nature; and evidence of the transformative power of the gospel to change its writer from a “Son of Thunder” to an apostle of love. John didn’t use this moniker to flaunt a badge of honor as the favorite among the disciples; instead, he utilized it as an act of humility.

Beloved. It’s a name that leaves room for all of us to claim. I’m the woman Jesus loves. You are the man, the woman, the daughter, the son, the friend, the reader Jesus loves. If you struggle to believe this truly is for you, I invite you to pray this simple prayer right now:

“Lord, You tell me I am loved by You. Sometimes, I struggle to believe it. Please help me to embrace Your love and share it with others. Help me to set aside my doubts and embrace my role as a beloved child in Your kingdom. In the name of Jesus, Amen.”

THE DEEP, DEEP LOVE

What labels shaped your identity, and how does faith transform them? What nicknames do you carry that fail to convey the whole truth of who you are? While I’m not keen on the pet names that have been attached to me at various times in my life by family and friends, I can also appreciate how God has attached a

beautiful one to my heart: Beloved. Again, that name isn't just for me; God doesn't play favorites with any of His kids (Acts 10:34; John 1:12).

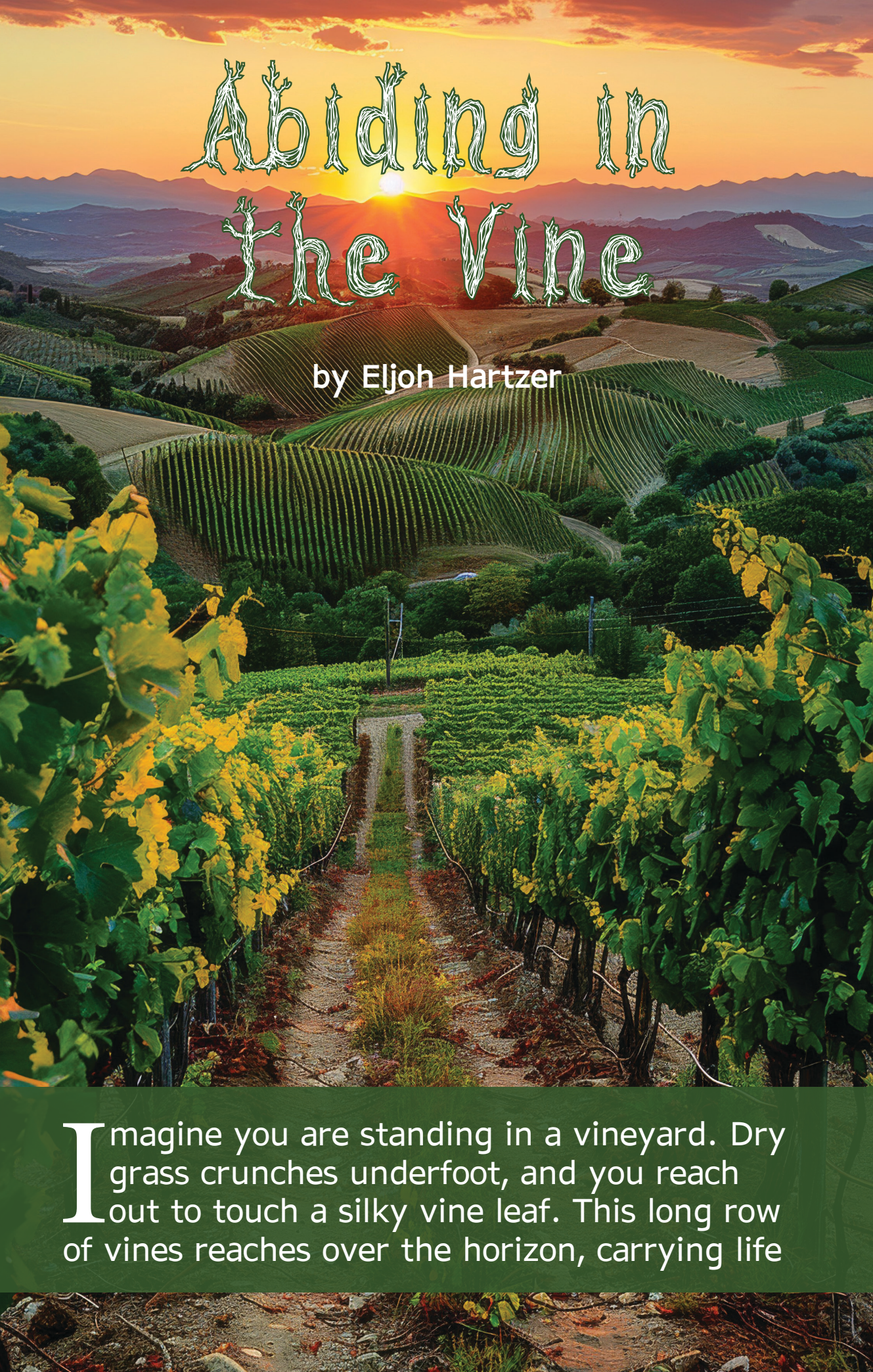
Beloved.
It's a name
that leaves
room for
all of us to
claim.

As you read this edition, reflect on the depth of love and relationship at the heart of the Gospel of John, recognizing how it stands out from the other accounts. John's self-description as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is a reminder that the story is not about favoritism. It's much deeper.

Remember the classic children's song "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands"? It's what comes to mind when contemplating the wide embrace of God's love — it's open to all of us.

As you journey through this Gospel and the essays to follow, allow yourself to enter the narratives, see yourself as one whom Jesus loves, and discover the transformative power described in each relationship. Even if this is not your first time through John's Gospel, read with expectation, enjoy the richness of John's witness, and let these writings inspire a deeper understanding and appreciation for the Savior's love, beloved reader.

Jeri Lyn Rogge is the director of editorial and outreach ministries at Christian Record Services in Lincoln, Nebraska.



Abiding in the Vine

by Eljoh Hartzer

Imagine you are standing in a vineyard. Dry grass crunches underfoot, and you reach out to touch a silky vine leaf. This long row of vines reaches over the horizon, carrying life

through its very being. Feeling the warm sun on your face, you tilt your head up and take a deep breath of fresh air. Oh, to be standing in a vineyard on a sunny day!

There's a popular passage found in the Gospels, where Jesus described Himself as a vine: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NIV).

In this article, I invite you to explore vine imagery with me, as found in chapter 15 of the Gospel of John. This chapter has rich depth for us to uncover and apply to our lives as followers of Him, who calls Himself "the Vine."

BECOMING A FRUIT FACTORY

The word "Christian" essentially means "mini-Christ." When we believe in and follow Jesus, we are transformed by the Spirit and motivated by the Word to become more like Him, to be His echo, shadow, or apprentice. However, we often try to do this in our own strength. We forget we are branches on a vine, and we somehow convince ourselves we should be able to push out godly fruits all by ourselves. We strive to become a factory that processes a lot of fruit, but never produces any of our own. We may read the books, listen to the sermons, and do all the right things, yet our lives remain barren, dry, and fruitless.

Here is when the lies creep in: *What is wrong with me? Why can't I do good? Where did I go wrong? Who would think I'm lovable?*

John 15 proposes a different way. Consider verse 4: "Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me." Fruitfulness is not something we can summon from within ourselves; it is the natural byproduct of a branch that is connected to a vine in the right circumstances. Our lives will not be transformed by sheer willpower. We need Jesus more desperately than a plant needs water. He is the true Source we need to thrive.

Now, you might think: "That is well and good, but how can this happen? How do I abide in the Vine? How do I stay connected to Him and not rely solely on myself?"

DRAWING NEAR THE TRELLIS

A vine does not grow all by itself. When placed on a trellis, the plant can bear much more fruit. The trellis brings order and structure, protecting the vine against destructive weather and pests. If God is the Trellis, we need to draw near to Him.

How can we do this? First, we need to realign our beliefs with the truth. Verse 3 says: "You are already clean because of the word I have

spoken to you.” This is also true about you. The very second you surrendered your heart to Jesus, you were made clean. He did not just wash your feet. He changed your very nature.

A friend explained how it was like a sinking stone in a flowing stream. The grace of God does not just pick us up and take us out of the stream; it changes us from stone to wood. Now, we will be placed back into the water, but our nature will have undergone a change. We will be able to float on the surface of the water rather than sinking into it. If Jesus says, “You are already clean,” who are we to disagree with Him?

Remind yourself of your new identity in Christ by memorizing this verse. When uncertainties arise or lies creep in, say this verse out loud. If the doubts tearing at your heart whisper, “You are not good enough,” don’t give up. Reply to that doubt: “Actually, that is not the truth. Jesus calls me clean.”

The first step to learning how to abide in the Vine — to live near Him — is to fix these foundational beliefs and to lean against the Trellis.

EMBRACING THE SEASONS

Similar to how nature experiences seasons, people’s lives also undergo periods of change. Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father

is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1-2). Abiding in the Vine means that, while we change due to the seasons of our life and human nature, Jesus remains our ever-present Companion. “I will not leave you as orphans” (John 14:18).

Winter in our lives may be a time of pruning and preparation, as we prepare for new growth. Spring is when we bloom and flourish, full of energy and zeal. In summertime, the sun is out and we can get a lot of work done. With fall’s arrival, we lose some leaves, and our energy diminishes as we prepare for hibernation.

Prayerfully consider these questions right now: What season am I in? How can I glorify God and be a faithful witness to Jesus in my current life circumstances?

Psalm 1 speaks of a luscious tree, flourishing beside a river. It is deeply rooted; therefore, its leaves never wither. However our lives may change, it is possible to remain healthy and happy if we stay close to Him.

REMAINING IN HIS LOVE

To abide or remain in Jesus is the ultimate goal of a believer’s life. It’s not about how much we can do for Him or how much fruit we can carry on conveyor belts. It’s about the fruit that

comes out of us when we are squeezed. Like a sponge, we absorb the things we surround ourselves with, and that is what comes out when life gets hard. But the branch is like the Vine from the inside out. It is connected to the Vine, staying near it at all times. Its fruit comes from the overflow. "If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love" (John 15:7-9).

What might this look like for you? Here are actions you can implement today to begin or strengthen your journey of remaining in His love:

- Identify the things in your life that pull your heart (affections) away from Jesus.
- Spend time with God: Talk to Him, read His Word, and become aware of His presence.

As you reflect on your own journey, I invite you to draw near to Jesus — the true Vine — in prayer. Pause now and talk to Him about what stood out from this essay for you today. Before moving on, abide in the Vine for a moment longer.

Eljoh Hartzler is a Christian artist, writer, and editor based in Malmesbury, South Africa.

The Lamb of God

by Richard Clark Jr.
Answers from the NIV.

Across

4. "'We have found the ___' (that is, the Christ)" (John 1:41).

8. "A ___ has no honor in his own country" (John 4:44).

9. "The Father loves the Son and has placed ___ in His hands" (John 3:35).

13. "I am the living bread that came down from ___" (John 6:51).

15. "Just as the ___ raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it" (John 5:21).

17. "Then ___ declared, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God'" (John 1:49).

20. "___ Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3).

21. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the ___, so the Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14).

Down

1. "Though the world was made through Him, the world did not ___ Him" (John 1:10).

2. "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be ___" (John 6:12).

3. "The water I give them will become in them a spring of water ___ up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

5. "___ this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

6. "Now we have heard for ___, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

7. "In the ___ was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

10. "The one and only Son, who is ___ God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known" (John 1:18).

11. "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, ___ again to a mountain by Himself" (John 6:15).

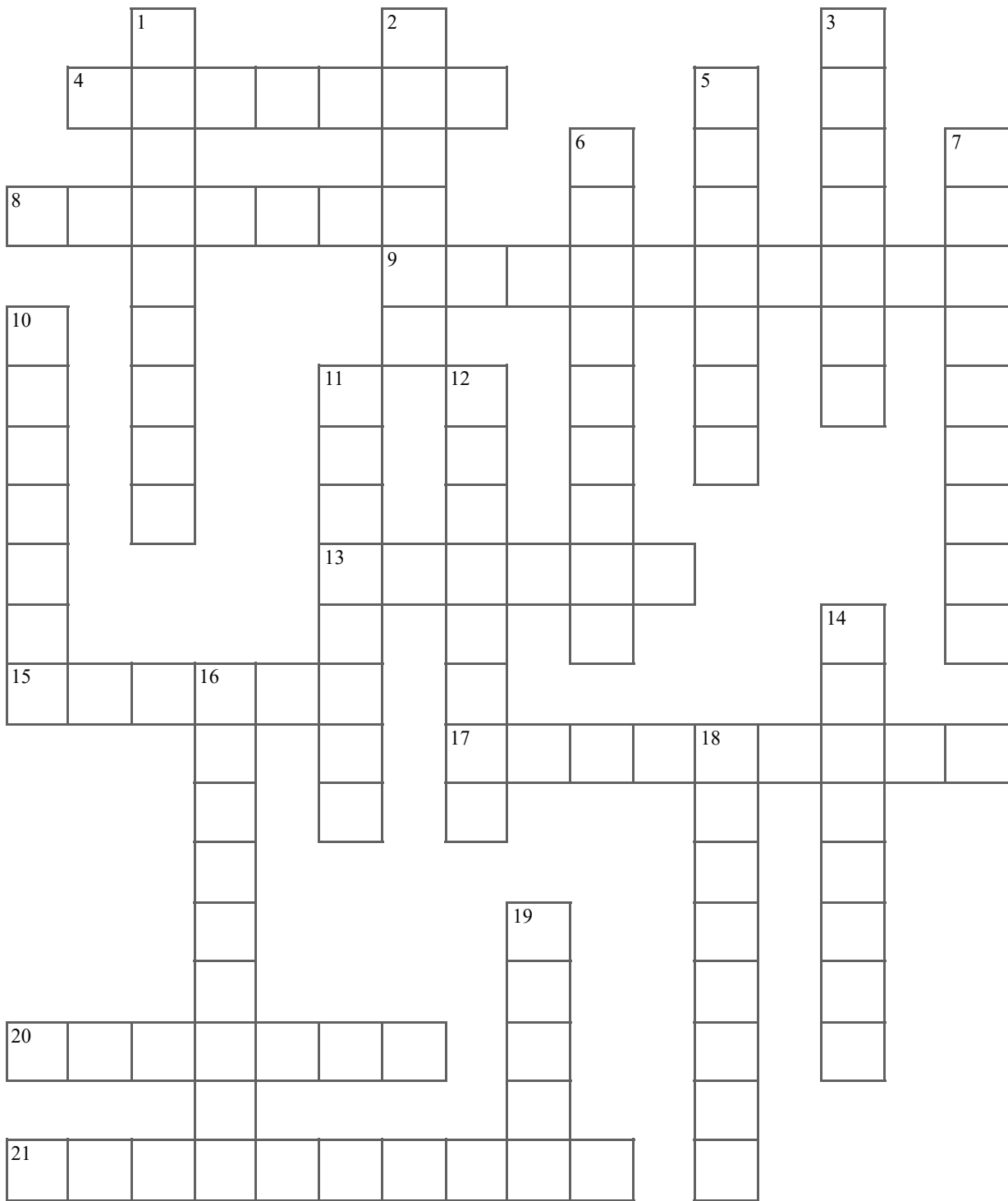
12. "'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming....' Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one ___ to you — I am He'" (John 4:25-26).

14. "His mother said to the servants, 'Do ___ He tells you'" (John 2:5).

16. "Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he and his whole ___ believed" (John 4:53).

18. "Jesus ___, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent'" (John 6:29).

19. "If you believed ___, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46).



Puzzle Answers on page 27.

Who Is John in Today's World?

by Ruhama Tewodros Assefa



HEARING HIS VOICE

Have you ever wondered what John, the beloved disciple, would say if he lived today? How would he tell the story of Jesus? Would it be podcasts, reels, or text messages instead of parchment? In a world of

constant notifications and endless distractions, how would he point people to the Savior he loved so deeply?

Maybe the bigger question is this: Could we be John in today's world? Could it be that we are called to point people to Jesus with the same clarity, intimacy, and love?

To me, this isn't just an idea — it's a journey. The Holy Spirit has been my teacher, guiding me step by step. He speaks as Father and Friend, and my job is to listen, follow, and learn. For a long time, I thought God's voice had to be heard with my ears. Instead, it often comes to us in stillness — through prayer, fasting, and engaging with His Word.

Learning to listen takes patience, almost like a soldier waiting for a command. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27, NIV).

A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

Sometimes, my conversations with God happen in the most unexpected places. I wear a face mask when I go for walks or sit in class so I can whisper prayers without anyone thinking I'm strange. His presence has shaped my whole personality and even started my writing journey when I was very young.

One day, while I was doing my hair — which, let me confess, takes hours if you have

curly hair — I played a Christian movie called *The Encounter*. In one scene, a character symbolizing Jesus told a woman her journals were only what she wanted people to know. But then He added something: There is another book, one written by Him, where every story and deed of a person's life is recorded. That book will be opened on Judgment Day.

I froze. It felt like an electric shock went through me. I read John's Gospel and the Bible before, but in that moment, the Spirit reminded me that Jesus has the power to erase my sins. I prayed in Amharic — my beloved mother tongue as an Ethiopian, and the language in which I pour out my prayers.

My heart overflowed: "Thank You for erasing my sins with Your blood. Thank You for being the way for me." Like the woman in the movie, I realized I don't have a story to be proud of on my own, but Jesus chose to die for me anyway. He loved me when I didn't deserve it. And this is precisely what the Gospel of John shows us: the love of God reaching down to us, not because of what we've done, but because of who He is.

WHAT MAKES JOHN'S GOSPEL DIFFERENT

When we open John's Gospel, we see Jesus in a way unlike any other book of the Bible. The

other Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — tell us about His birth, teachings, miracles, and parables. John lifts the curtain higher, letting us see Jesus not only as a man but as God Himself.

John begins with eternity, not a manger. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). From the very first verse, John reminds us that Jesus didn’t start in Bethlehem. He is the eternal God who stepped into time for our sake.

John highlights seven signs. He doesn’t list every miracle, but he chooses seven, and each one carries a more profound message:

- 1. Turning water into wine** — showing His power to transform (John 2:1-11).
- 2. Healing the official’s son** — proving His word alone is enough to heal (John 4:46-54).
- 3. Healing the lame man at Bethesda** — showing His authority over hopelessness (John 5:1-15).
- 4. Feeding the 5,000** — pointing to Him as the Bread of Life (John 6:1-15).
- 5. Walking on water** — revealing His mastery over creation (John 6:16-21).
- 6. Healing the man born blind** — showing He is the Light of the World (John 9:1-41).

7. **Raising Lazarus** — proving He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:1-44).

Each of these signs is more than an event. They are windows into Jesus' divine identity.

John records seven "I Am" statements. Every time Jesus says, "I Am," He echoes God's name revealed to Moses at the burning bush. Each one reveals His heart for us:

1. **"I am the Bread of Life."** Jesus sustains our souls (John 6:35).
2. **"I am the Light of the World."** He shines into our darkness (John 8:12).
3. **"I am the gate."** Jesus opens the way to salvation (John 10:9).
4. **"I am the Good Shepherd."** He lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11).
5. **"I am the resurrection and the life."** Jesus holds victory over death (John 11:25).
6. **"I am the Way, the truth, and the life."** He is our only path home (John 14:6).
7. **"I am the true Vine."** Jesus is our source of fruitfulness (John 15:1).

John replaces parables with conversations. Instead of long stories, we see intimate dialogues — Jesus with Nicodemus at night, the Samaritan woman at the well, and Martha grieving at her brother's tomb. These

encounters reveal Jesus doesn't just preach to crowds; He sits with individuals, listens to their struggles, and offers eternal hope.

With Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of being born again, showing religion without relationship is insufficient.

With the Samaritan woman, He broke down cultural barriers and offered living water — reminding us His grace includes the marginalized.

With Mary and Martha, Jesus wept and then called Lazarus from the grave — proving His compassion is as real as His power.

John calls us to believe. He doesn't leave us guessing about his purpose: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

AN INVITATION

From journaling and walking with God, I've learned that when we read John slowly, guided by the Holy Spirit, the words don't stay on the page. They rise, ask questions, and call us to live differently. We can't capture all its richness in a short article, but we can let the Spirit teach us.

Aren't you tired of coming to God only with requests? As a child, I waited for my parents to bring treats or gifts, but as I grew older,

I cared more about their presence — I just wanted them to be home safe. It's the same with God. Spiritual growth is reaching a place where even if He gives us nothing, His presence alone is enough. That's why we must slow down, fast, pray, and study John deeply. Its truth transforms us one day at a time.

LIVING HIS WORD

What strikes me most in John's Gospel is how he carefully introduces John the Baptist, the prophet who came before Jesus to prepare the way. The apostle clearly writes that the baptizer wasn't the Light himself but came to reflect the Light (John 1:8). This truth humbles me deeply. We, too, are not the Source of this light; that belongs to Jesus alone. However, like John the Baptist, we can reflect Jesus in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities. Being a reflector of Christ isn't complicated — it can be as simple as showing kindness, encouraging a friend, or forgiving someone. Each small act spreads His light into a dark world.

Reading John reminds me we're called to be disciples for our generation — not just receivers of God's Word, but reflectors of His truth. When I write, I often feel like I'm talking to Him, and His Word responds, shielding me from fear and reminding me of His love. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden Your word in my heart that I

might not sin against You.” After His 40-day fast, Jesus employed the words of Scripture to defeat the devil.

I encourage you to open John’s Gospel, read slowly, and let the Holy Spirit whisper through the words. If doubts come, read John aloud and remind yourself of these truths every day.

SO, WHO IS JOHN IN TODAY’S WORLD?

It can be you. It can be me. John wrote so we might believe and live. Today, this call rests on us. In a world full of noise, doubt, and distraction, we are called to point people back to Jesus.

- **Be a mirror:** Reflect Jesus’ light, not your own. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV).
- **Be a voice:** Like John the Baptist, cry out in your wilderness and prepare the way for the Lord. “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him’” (Matthew 3:3).
- **Be a witness:** Live, speak, or write in a way showing others you have been with Jesus.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The world doesn’t just need more information — it needs transformation. Let’s dare to listen, follow, and reflect the light of our Lord.

Ruhama Tewodros Assefa is a 20-year-old dental student and writer sharing her faith and reflections on Christ-centered living from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Puzzle Answers

Across: 4. Messiah; 8. Prophet; 9. Everything; 13. Heaven; 15. Father; 17. Nathanael; 20. Through; 21. Wilderness;
Down: 1. Recognize; 2. Wasted; 3. Welling; 5. Destroy; 6. Ourselves; 7. Beginning; 10. Himself; 11. Withdrew; 12. Speaking; 14. Whatever; 16. Household; 18. Answered; 19. Moses

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Pages 10, 16-17, 19, 28, 35, 40-41, 42 — Freepik.com

Signs

by Kim Biasotto



Imagine a world without signs. No bright red octagons reminding me to stop my car. No green-and-white rectangles to indicate the name of the street I live on. I decided to daydream a little bit about this. What could this look like? Here is where my mind drifted off to ...

I'm late for my first day at a new job and didn't get my morning smoothie before rushing out the door. Desperate for a sip of fruity goodness, I pull up to what I think is a local smoothie shop. I dash inside — only to discover I entered an auto parts store. *Ugh*. If only they had had a sign. Luckily, they have an ancient mini-fridge containing a variety of dusty juice bottles. While these are intended for customers only, the store manager takes pity on me and gives me a small bottle of OJ. I offer a sincere thank you and hurry out the door.

I get back on the road, struggling to remove the twist-off top. Finally, I succeed and take a swig, but fail to remove all the dust from the bottle. *Yuck*.

I have to go to 1857 Market Street, but for some reason, there are no street signs in this part of town. I turn left down a street with many office buildings, hoping this is Market Street. It is not. I am now driving against the flow of traffic on a one-way street. I quickly make a U-turn. I assume this is legal, as there is

no sign indicating otherwise. As my car rotates, I spill the last few drops of the repair shop orange juice on my new white blouse. When I finally arrive at the correct destination, thanks to directions from a kind stranger on the sidewalk, I'm frazzled. My future coworkers stare at me, wondering, *What's with the new girl?*

That may be a bit extreme, but you understand where I am going, right? Signs are important. They tell us where to go. They inform us what is inside and where to turn, when to walk, and when to wait.

In the Gospel of John, the author recounts seven signs of Jesus. The other Gospels refer to them as miracles — and they were. However, John uses the word "signs" instead. Why? To point us to who Jesus is, as opposed to what Jesus can do.

Just as signs and labels are important indicators that guide us, the signs of Jesus serve the same purpose. Feeding the 5,000 not only reveals Jesus' ability to perform miracles, but it also shows us His concern for our everyday needs. His healing of the royal official's son emphasizes the power of His voice as well as His heart for a hurting father.

From the opening verse, we gain insight into Jesus' identity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This revelation continues throughout the

book, culminating in the final sign described in John 11, which reflects Jesus' own experience in the near future. It's this last sign we will focus on here as I summarize this story.

There once was a man named Lazarus who had two sisters, Mary and Martha. Now, the Bible does not specify who was the firstborn and who was the last; however, many people believe Martha was the eldest, followed by Mary, and then Lazarus. Whatever the order, in John's Gospel, they are grown and friends with Jesus.

One day, Lazarus became critically ill. So, his sisters sent a message to Jesus, telling Him their brother was very sick.

When Jesus received the message, one might think He would jump up and head to Bethany, the town where His friend Lazarus lived. But that is not what happened. Instead, Jesus remained in the area of Perea — a Greek word meaning "the land beyond."

Jesus remained in this land beyond for two more days before He said to His disciples, "Let's go to Judea again," where the city of Bethany is located.

The disciples were not thrilled with this idea. "Don't you remember? We were there just a few days ago, and some of the Jewish leaders wanted to kill you. We really don't think this is the best plan."

Jesus assured them that this was the best plan and reminded them, essentially, that the safest place for us is where God wants us to be, and today, that is in Judea. Then, He added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to go and wake him up."

During the long walk to Judea, the disciples thought, *Well, if Lazarus is asleep, that must mean he is getting better.* They assumed Jesus meant Lazarus was getting a good night's sleep. Jesus quickly corrected this misunderstanding, stating plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

When they reached Bethany, Martha ran out to meet him. She said, "Lord, if only You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give You whatever You ask."

Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha conceded that, yes, on the last day, her brother will rise again. She didn't get it. Jesus then reveals more of who He is. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in Me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in Me and believes in Me will never ever die."

Martha returned to her house, where Mary was, and told her Jesus was in town. The two of them traveled outside the village to the place where Jesus was staying. Many people assumed

they were going to visit Lazarus at his tomb, so they followed them.

When Mary saw Jesus, she ran to Him, fell to the ground, and burst into tears. She loved her brother and was so sad he had died. She also knew Jesus could have healed him if He had just been there. Jesus saw how grief-stricken she was. He also heard the other people crying.

He asked, "Where is he buried?" Mary, still crying, told Him. Jesus saw her brokenness. He watched the tears run down her face. He experienced the sadness of all the other people there. Then, we come to the shortest verse in the Bible. It is only two words long: "Jesus wept."

Pause here for a moment. The Light of the world, the Messiah sent from God, the resurrection and the life, wept. He knew Lazarus would be well in a matter of moments. He knew God's plan, His endgame. And yet, our Savior wept with those who were weeping. That is mind-blowing.

Next, Jesus instructs them to remove the stone covering the entrance to the tomb. Martha stammered, "Um, Lord, that is not the best idea. He has been dead for four days now. It is going to stink!"

Jesus insisted she trust Him, "You will see God's glory if you believe." So, they rolled the

stone away. Jesus looked up to heaven and said to His Father, "Thank you for hearing Me." Next, He looked at the cave and cried, "Lazarus, come out!"

All of a sudden, there was movement in the tomb. Something was happening. A man was walking towards them. His arms, legs, and head were wrapped in cloth. They removed the cloth and found a living and healthy Lazarus underneath. I like to think that all the tears of sadness everyone had just been crying transformed into tears of joy and amazement. I imagine Jesus gave His friend a big hug. His eyes also filled with tears of joy.

This is a fantastic miracle and an encouraging sign. In this one story, we learn Jesus is one whose timing we can trust, even if we don't understand it. We are reminded that He weeps with us when we hurt. Jesus demonstrates that the safest place we can be is in the center of God's will.

What signs has God placed in your life recently, and how are they pointing you toward Him? Remember, if you experience times when you feel like God is in the land beyond, out of reach, and out of touch, let this story remind you that He sees, knows, cares, and heals.

Kim Biasotto is a writer, speaker, and podcaster who lives in Wilmington, Delaware.

How to Wait

by Ray McAllister



What should you do when you feel abandoned by God? What happens when it seems God is light-years away? Where do you go when you pray and pray and God seems silent?

If we can learn to wait the way Mary Magdalene did, could God find us?

There is a story near the end of the Gospel of John that can shed light on these issues. If we can learn to wait the way Mary Magdalene did, could God find us?

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Let's look at the account of Jesus' resurrection in John 20. It's early Sunday morning, and Jesus has been dead since Friday. Mary Magdalene visits the tomb and finds it empty. She runs to Peter and John to report what she found. They rush to the sepulcher, and it's still vacant. Jesus' grave clothes are folded neatly. Grave robbers wouldn't bother to waste time removing the body and folding the garments. They would want to get out of there before getting caught.

Nobody knows what's happening. So, the disciples leave. Mary remains, weeping, clinging to the last place she knew Jesus was.

As she weeps, she looks into the tomb to see

two angels, one at the head and the other at the feet. John 20:13 describes what happens next: “‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him’” (NASB1995).

After this, she turns and sees a person, not realizing it’s Jesus. Now, what we usually focus on is when Mary is waiting and weeping at the tomb. Often, interlude scenes like this are skipped. We know how the story ends, but Mary did not, so there is suspense the reader should not ignore. We also have questions to answer: Why did Mary stay even after the disciples left? Did she and Jesus have a special connection?

Why did Mary stay even after the disciples left?

WHO WAS MARY MAGDALENE?

To answer these questions and gain context, we need to explore aspects of Mary’s life, and what follows is a summary.

Luke 8:2 states that Mary Magdalene had seven demons cast out of her, most likely by Jesus. This shows she had a very troubled past.

Then, in Luke 10:38-42, a story is told about Mary and her sister, Martha. Martha is working,

preparing a meal for Jesus, who is an honored guest. According to verse 39, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, as a disciple would before a rabbi. She is listening to His wisdom, receiving all she can.

According to John 12, Mary ministers to Jesus again just six days before He would die. In a gathering with Jesus, His disciples, and Mary's family, she approaches Jesus. As verse 3 notes, "Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Mary's expensive gift demonstrates her gratitude for the grace Jesus extended to her on numerous occasions. Then, in John 19, when Jesus was crucified, she remained nearby, bearing witness to His ultimate sacrifice for humanity.

Clearly, Mary had a special connection with Jesus, one none of His disciples likely understood. It's no wonder she wasn't going to give up and leave as quickly as the disciples did when she discovered the tomb was empty.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

The remarkable aspect of this story in John 20 is that Mary took the most logical action by waiting. We can understand this more clearly by considering this example from my childhood. My parents used to take me with them to visit flea markets. Early on, my mother

said if we ever got separated from them, I was to stay where I was and wait. In the worst case, Mom and Dad would pace up and down the

rows in the market and eventually find me.

If I were moving around, I might end up in a place they'd already searched, which would mean they'd have to search everywhere all over again. We never got separated, but in such a large place, it was not inconceivable that something like that could happen.

Mary remained where she was and let Jesus come to her. That is precisely what I was told to do in the event of separation. In fact, she met Jesus before the official disciples did. They went away and missed this opportunity. While Jesus met them later, Mary encountered Jesus first, and it happened right where she remained.

It's possible Mary was so emotionally troubled she had no strength to do anything but wait. We've all experienced moments when we are so hurt or afraid that we can't move from where we are. Nonetheless, whatever happened, the result of her actions was an early meeting with the resurrected Jesus.

The lesson from this story is simple: If we

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feel distant from God, our best strategy is to remain still and wait for Him. He knows where we are. He wants to find us more than we want to be

found. If we remain still and wait, we will be in the best mindset to receive His Presence.

I recall a situation when I did this while I was a seminary student at Andrews University. A problematic situation arose in the church where I was serving. One evening, I sat on a bench on campus and prayed, "Lord, I'm not leaving until I have the answer for what to do." Then, I waited. Within an hour, the solution was forming, and when I explained it to a friend, she agreed it was a good idea. It's hard to believe something so simple could solve a big problem, but God has all the answers. We must have faith, desperation, or a combination of both, to be still and receive Him.

I conclude this essay with a poem about Mary's encounter at the tomb in John 20, which presents a challenge to adhere to a more spiritual way of living. The poem may appear to have a sad ending, but we all know the real ending of this story. I want you to be left at the instant before the problem is resolved, with the knowledge that it most certainly will, and the weeping will stop.

Mary at the Tomb

I stand alone
Before this empty tomb
And wait
And weep.

I do not understand this.
I do not know how this happened
Or why this must be.
I simply wait
And weep.

All I know
Is that I have lost
More than I can comprehend
And I will not leave
As others might
But I will remain
To wait
And weep.

I have nowhere to go.
There is nothing to say
Nothing to do
But stay forever locked
In this empty moment
To wait
--
And weep.



Ray McAllister is a regular contributor to Light magazine from Berrien Center, Michigan.

Just a Little Talk With Jesus

by Rhianna McGregor Hajzer



When my grandmother was dying, I took refuge in her favorite book — the Gospel of John. In its pages, I

discovered a comfort I hadn't expected: Jesus meeting people so personally, speaking into their lives in ways that felt tender, immediate, and real. It's John's focus on the intimacy of the conversations Jesus had with those around Him that makes John's Gospel feel so distinctive and alive.

As I read, I felt the same nearness to Christ that had drawn my grandmother to Him — a gentle presence that reached into my grief and offered peace when I needed it most. It is in these personal encounters, recorded so poignantly by John, that we see Jesus meeting real people in real struggles, which gives a glimpse of the same tenderness He offers each of us today.

NICODEMUS: JOHN 3:1-21

Jesus meets Nicodemus in the place where all our stories begin — in the dark. As a Pharisee and member of the Jewish council, Nicodemus' nighttime visit with Jesus speaks not only to the fear of retribution from his fellow Jews, but also to the strength of the call of God he felt in his heart. Risking his reputation, Nicodemus seeks out Jesus for answers — and finds something far greater: salvation. Initially drawn by

**Jesus meets
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— in the dark.**

Jesus' miracles, Nicodemus is soon confronted by a profound truth: the need for spiritual rebirth. Jesus tells him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, ESV). While his response to the gospel isn't recorded that night, Nicodemus' transformation becomes clear later. First, he defends Jesus to the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-51). Then, he attends to Jesus' body after the crucifixion (John 19:39). Nicodemus came to Jesus in spiritual darkness, but through the grace and power of the gospel, Jesus brought him into the light of new life with Christ. And it's an offer Jesus extends to each of us today.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: JOHN 4:1-42

Unlike Nicodemus, who came to Jesus under the cover of night, the Samaritan woman encountered Him by the well in broad daylight. Startled that a Jewish rabbi would speak with her, much less ask for a drink of water, she is nonetheless curious about the living water He offers and asks where she can find it. In His work of transforming sinners into sons and daughters, Jesus reveals He knows her sins, sees her in the midst of her brokenness, and yet loves her still. When she mentions the coming Messiah, He reveals, for the first time in recorded Scripture, that He is indeed the Messiah: "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:26). He is the living water she has been seeking.

Confronted by His knowledge of her life and the revelation of His divinity, she is transformed from an outsider to a seeker to a bold witness. In the presence of Jesus, shame lost its hold over her, and she was free — a freedom which is available to all of us if we earnestly seek Him and drink the living water of His grace.

THE DISCIPLES: JOHN 14

As one of Jesus' own disciples, John records many of the conversations they shared — moments in which Jesus reveals the purpose of His earthly ministry and the greater truth of who He is and the Father's eternal plan of redemption. This is a rich and deeply comforting passage. Spoken on the night before His betrayal, Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit to help them after He has gone and assures them that He will prepare a place for them in glory. Yet, it's the disciples' questions — asked from their limited, human understanding — through which Jesus chooses to reveal the truth about Himself. When Thomas wonders how they can know the way, Jesus answers, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Later, when Philip longs to see the Father, Jesus reveals that "whoever has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

In these tender exchanges, Jesus calms the disciples' anxieties and extends the same assurances to believers today: to know Christ is to know the way to eternal life, through the Spirit He is with us, and often it's in our questions and uncertainties where He reveals Himself more fully, reminding us His truth and presence are sufficient.

PETER: JOHN 21:15-17

Just as His disciples' questions didn't deter Jesus, He isn't stopped by their failures, either. In fact, Jesus predicts that Peter, one of His most outspoken disciples, will deny Him three times before the rooster crows (John 13:38). It's on the heels of this denial, by the Sea of Galilee, the resurrected Jesus finds Peter and, even amid his brokenness, brings healing, restoration, and purpose. It begins, however, with a question every believer must face: "Do you love Me?" Three times, Jesus asks Peter to affirm his love, and each time, Jesus accompanies it with a command: "Feed My sheep" (John 21:17). Despite his failings, Jesus affirms the mission He set forth for Peter from the beginning — to build His church and shepherd His people in the truth. Peter's restoration reminds us of God's faithfulness, that even in our failures, He calls us back, restores us, and continues to accomplish His good will when we respond in love and obedience.

Reading these encounters in John reminds me that Jesus' ministry was never impersonal or distant. He met people in their questions, their shame, fears, and

failures. Just as He gently guided Nicodemus, empowered the Samaritan woman, reassured His disciples, and restored Peter, He continues to meet us in the quiet, ordinary, and even dark and painful moments of our lives.

Reading these encounters in John reminds me that Jesus' ministry was never impersonal or distant.

In my grief, I experienced afresh the truth John so beautifully captures: Jesus is the miracle worker, the Son of God, and a friend who knows our hearts more intimately than any other. His words remind us that no darkness is too deep, no shame too great, and no failure too heavy for His grace. It is the nearness of our Lord and Savior, revealed through these tender conversations, that reflects His never-ending love for His children. It was in the pages of John that my grandmother first met Jesus, and it is through this Gospel that we are invited into a relationship with Jesus — one that brings comfort, hope, and the assurance of an eternity with Him.

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