

INTO THE LIGHT

MARY DEMUTH

A BIBLICAL
APPROACH TO
HEALING FROM
THE PAST

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EDITORIAL TEAM, ADULT MINISTRY PUBLISHING

Becky Loyd

Director, Adult Ministry

Michelle Hicks

Manager, Adult Ministry
Short Term Bible Studies

Elizabeth Hyndman

Content Editor

Erin Franklin

Production Editor

Lauren Ervin

Graphic Designer

Micah Kandros

Cover Design

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



MARY DEMUTH

If you met Mary DeMuth today, her joy might confuse you. Whom she has become in light of tragedy is a testimony of Jesus' ability to transform a broken life. Mary was a child of three divorces, a victim of repeated sexual assault at five years old, and a daughter of a father who died when she was ten. Mary wanted to end her life in her teens. In the tenth grade, she heard about Jesus, and she knew she wanted to chase after Him for the rest of her life. Thankfully, He chased her.

Mary is the author of forty books, including the book this study is based on: *We Too: How the Church Can Respond Redemptively to the Sexual Abuse Crisis*. She has spoken around the world about God's ability to transform a life, bringing needed freedom to her audiences. She's the host of the popular daily podcast *Pray Every Day*, and she's been on *CNN* and featured in *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, and *The New York Times*. She's spoken around the world in places like Munich, Johannesburg, Port-au-Prince, Geneva, and Monte Carlo, and she's planted a church with her family in southern France.

Her best work? Being a mom to three amazing young adults and the wife of twenty-nine years to Patrick. She makes her home in Dallas alongside her husband, an energetic chocolate lab, and a fuzzy black cat. Find out more at MaryDeMuth.com or WeToo.org.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! I am proud of you. I applaud your bravery and compassion as you pick up this study. You are someone who deeply cares about the people in your life, and you understand that the God of compassion has empowered you to be empathetic toward those who are broken and walking wounded. You intrinsically understand that you, along with your brothers and sisters around the world, are the hands and feet of Jesus to those who are scattered without shepherds, who feel lost and utterly alone.

Perhaps you have felt that way too.

The overarching goal of this study, based on my book, *We Too: How the Church Can Respond Redemptively to the Sexual Abuse Crisis*, is for us to learn how to become both a good shepherd and a good Samaritan. Our time together will not specifically deal with that type of traumatic situation; instead, this study is broadened to anyone who has suffered. My prayer is we can learn how to help all the people in our lives, particularly those who are walking through struggle or trauma.

The prophet Ezekiel detailed the chastisement God had for the nation of Israel, who failed to not only proclaim God as good and in want of a relationship with the whole wide world, but also failed by treating others with unkind harshness. Consider these cautionary words in Ezekiel 34:4-6:

You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd, and they are easy prey for any wild animal. They have wandered through all the mountains and all the hills, across the face of the earth, yet no one has gone to search for them.

What a picture of the broken today. We are a world of wanderers, untethered. Technology has simultaneously "connected" us to people all over the world while reminding us of the difficult truth: We are lonely and often alone. In isolation, predatory people prey. And in the aftermath of that preying, refugees of sadness are in desperate need of our prayers.

People need to be searched for. They bear the image of their Creator. Because of this, they are worthy of pursuit. And yet so many have struggled. They have

battled family structures that neglected or perpetrated against them. They have experienced betrayal, abandonment, and contempt. And some of those injuries occurred within the four walls of the church. They long for genuine community, but their hearts are fearful. Their trust muscle has atrophied.

We can be the answer to their prayers.

Not by our strength. Not by our wits. Not by our cleverness. But by His beautiful, wooing Spirit.

This study is for them, but it is so much for you too. In order to pursue and refresh others, you must first put yourself under the spigot of God's grace. You must sit, as Mary of Bethany did, in the position of the Rabbi's disciple—at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39). In this place of discipleship and encouragement, you will be poured into. And from that well of overabundance, you will be able to help those who hurt.

Proverbs 11:25 reminds us, "The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed."

That is my prayer for you as you work through the next seven sessions.

Please note this study is not intended to be legal counsel or to provide holistic counseling or pastoral care on the issue of abuse. The study gives a theological foundation for healing, brings understanding on the issues connected to abuse, and gives practical wisdom by which women can navigate complex situations.

SESSION ONE

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LOVING THE BROKEN

You don't have to venture far from your phone or the screens in your life to find pain. It's everywhere. Trauma has permeated our feeds on a micro and macro scale. Everywhere, people are suffering. It's overwhelming, and it's pervasive. And because of the fall of humankind, it's (sadly) to be expected.

When I turn through the pages of the Bible, I see a similar chaos. Violence, predation, annihilation of people groups, crucifixion, betrayal, strife within families, double crossing, war, famine, poverty, prejudice, wrath—all this within the pages of the sacred text.

These are not the passages we post on Instagram, but they are instructive. The Lord meant for the story of Job to be in the Bible, after all. Why? Because in this world we will suffer.

The entire narrative of the Bible is the story of a God who relentlessly pursues His people, despite their infidelity, waywardness, and penchant for worshipping idols and themselves. It is a divine rescue mission, inaugurated in God's mind, where He would dare leave the beauty of heaven to pitch a tent with humanity. And as He did, Jesus taught us how to love each other. He showed us what sacrifice looked like. He sought out the least, the last, and the lost because it flowed from His nature.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are our coursework. How He encountered everyday people like you and me is wholly and beautifully instructive. Not only that, but the gospel is clear: Jesus not only loved us, but He fully carried out the rescue mission of the Father. He bore the weight of every one of our sins on the cross, an innocent One dying for the guilty, His blood pouring from a crowned brow of thorns. He did this for me. He did this for you. Because of love and justice.

The resurrection proved His promises, divine nature, and rescue mission. God met humanity, conquered death, and ushered in a brand-new kingdom, this age of grace we live in today.

This is the place we find ourselves, balancing like a teeter-totter between the now and the not yet. Now, we are kingdom workers seeking to love God and serve others as we bumble through life. Now, we long to see people experience the very real redemption of Jesus. Now, we are still encumbered by sin, and we have to grapple with the sad reality that people can act inhumanely toward others—yes, even in the church, yes, even when the person is a leader in the church. Now, we encounter seemingly senseless suffering as a result of our world's brokenness.

This should not be, but it is our reality. All this confusion, cover up, and pain will be vanquished gloriously on the other side, but now? We must learn what it means to live in this current world.

Jesus put it simply: "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

Love God. Love others.

My hope for this week's study is that you will have a firm foundation as well as a theological construct from which to build a life that passionately loves Jesus and wisely loves those Jesus has brought into your life.

Mind if I pray for you?

Lord Jesus, would You open our eyes to Your hope for us? We need You as we look at those who are hurting. We need to understand You in the midst of the pain narrative. Help us to uncover Your empathy and make it our own, as we love those You have placed in our pathway. Reveal truth. Speak life. Renew our hearts like the dawn. Amen.

VIEWER GUIDE

SESSION ONE

Introduce yourself to the people in your group. What drew you to this study?

How did Mary's story encourage you? How did it help you see your own pain or someone else's pain in a different light?

Describe a time when you needed the empathy of another.

What do you think it means that "an untold story never heals"? How have you seen healing in your own life or in the life of others when their stories come into the light?

What do you hope to gain from this study?

NOTES

DAY ONE

THE ONE WHO NAMES GOD

When others are hurt, we naturally want to respond well. But often we don't know what to do or how to love them through their ordeals. During this first week of study, I want us to look at several passages of Scripture to demonstrate how the Bible provides a foundation as we learn to heal and help others heal from trauma.

Throughout the Bible, we see people grappling with suffering, whether physical, mental, emotional, or even social. The Bible is full of narratives, but just because a story exists within its pages does not mean the Bible promotes the behavior in the story. In other words, when we see a narrative of rape, the Bible's description of what happened is not a prescription of its permissibility, but simply a description of how a fallen people deal with trauma.

The Bible is not simply a manual of rules—to reduce it to that negates its majesty. The Word of God provides us with an abundance of stories that teach us how to navigate our world. In short, we are wired for stories. As we search the Scriptures, one of the most stunning revelations we experience is uncovering the great Story: When sin entered the world, God already had a proactive plan, one of redemption for all of us.

To be redeemed is to be bought back. Held hostage by sin, humankind cannot secure redemption, but God can and did through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This story informs our stories, even the ones that involve suffering. The beauty of the gospel is that it represents God's deep compassion for us all.

We see hints of the grand narrative of redemption throughout the Bible. Today, I want us to look at an unlikely heroine, Hagar.

Hagar represents so many who have been hurt by circumstances, God's people, and life. She was Sarai's maidservant, a pawn in Sarai's ploy to produce the promised offspring through conniving means. However, the moment Hagar became pregnant, Sarai despised her ability to conceive and began to mistreat her. After that, Hagar had two encounters with God that indelibly marked her. How God tenderly protected this maligned outcast is helpful to us as we seek to understand the heart and mind of a hurting person, as well as the compassionate *hesed* (loyal, covenantal love) of God toward His people.¹

Read Genesis 15:1-6.

What did God promise to Abram? How did Abram respond?

Read Genesis 16:1-3.

What do we learn in these verses about Hagar? What plan did Sarai come up with as a solution? Why do you think she came up with that plan?

Did Hagar have a choice in the matter, from what we can tell from Scripture?

Read Genesis 16:4-6.

In your own words, what happened next in Hagar's story?

Hagar then fled to the wilderness. The New Living Translation says, "The angel of the LORD found Hagar ..." (v. 7a). The angel asked her where she came from and where she was going. Hagar confessed she ran away. The angel told her to return to her mistress, and he made her a promise.

What did the angel promise in verse 10?

The angel told her to name her son Ishmael. What does his name mean?

Finish reading Genesis 16. What name did Hagar call the LORD?

What struck you as you read this biography of Hagar?

Hagar's name means "fleeing" or "flight" or "to flee."² We see Hagar live up to her name in two biblical accounts.

Why do you think Hagar began to treat Sarai with contempt?

Sarai blamed Abram for her problems. What does this teach us about their relationship? About Sarai's relationship with God?

We have heard the phrase, "Hurt people hurt people," and in this case, it appears to ring true. Sarai most likely carried the grief of barrenness a long time. For decades, she lived with the scorn of not being able to conceive. Being unable to conceive was considered blight from the Almighty, a judgment against someone. Without an heir, Sarai felt worthless. All that pain bottled up for so long could not help but seep out of her.

When has your grief seeped out onto another person?

Have you encountered someone who exemplified the phrase, "Hurt people hurt people"? What stuck with you from that encounter?

In this passage, Hagar ran into the angel of the LORD, who asked, “Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?” (v. 8a). The question revealed God’s compassion and empathy toward someone who was exploited. God wanted to know her story, and He was concerned for her future.

If we would simply ask others those two questions, we’d see a revival of healing in our midst. To listen and dignify a story is freeing, and to dream about the future alongside someone who has suffered trauma is redemptive.

The angel told Hagar the name of her upcoming child: Ishmael—it means “God hears.”³ Then she became the first person in Scripture to give God a name. “Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, ‘You are the God who sees me.’ She also said, ‘Have I truly seen the One who sees me?’” (v. 13).

God hears.

God sees.

When no one else does, God intervenes.⁴

Recount a time when God intervened in your life. What happened?

Throughout this study, I’ll ask you to fill in charts after reading a segment of Scripture. The reason we do this is that the bulk of studying the Word of God involves seeing what is written, observing, and asking questions. This is the essence of learning biblical theology. While you read a story or passage, answering these fundamental questions will empower you for future Bible study.

Read Genesis 21:1-21.

Make six observations about the text, answering who, what, when, where, why, and how.

WHO	
WHAT	
WHEN	
WHERE	
WHY	
HOW	

When Hagar fled this second time, she and her son were starving—utterly alone, battling quiet desperation. The one who named God fell into despair. She walked away from her son who was dying of malnutrition because she couldn't bring herself to watch him die.

In that moment, God heard and saw, asked a question, and then gave a command with a promise attached. "But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, 'Hagar, what's wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants'" (21:17-18).

What if we responded to broken people in a like manner? What if we dared to ask the question, "What's wrong?" while truly being interested in the person's response? What if we empathetically came alongside and gently encouraged someone away from fear and toward faith by believing them, helping them get safe, and pursuing appropriate justice for them? What if we, like the angel of the LORD to Hagar, proclaimed, prophetically, a belief in the beauty of future possibilities?

When has someone helped you move from current despair toward hope for the future?

The heart of God leans toward those who have been hurt. Consider the myriad passages about the quartet of the vulnerable (widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor) throughout the biblical narrative. God is concerned for the downtrodden, and He punishes those who oppress the least of these.

Sadly, we think of Hagar as a blip on the Pentateuchal radar—an interesting aside. But consider this: How would we know she had radical encounters with God unless she said something to those in power? How did Moses, the writer of Genesis, know Hagar's story? We know the Word of God is inspired by God, but I also have to wonder if Hagar told others her story. She must have spoken about what she suffered and encountered.

That's the power of story.

When have you listened to someone's story? How did it bring dignity and freedom to his or her life?

How did listening to someone's story encourage or challenge you when facing your own suffering?

Hagar's testimony serves as an encouragement to all survivors of betrayal, exploitation, and marginalization.

God heard her. (He hears you.) God saw her. (He sees you.) God hears those who mourn. God sees those who suffer under the weight of other people's exploitation.⁵

DAY TWO

THE BLEEDING ONE

Jumping forward in the biblical narrative to the New Testament, we see another desperate person longing for change and healing. She is unnamed, but she is forever known as the woman who could not stop bleeding, the one who made her way to the Messiah and touched the fringe of His garment. What bravery she had! What moxie!

Read Luke 8:40-48.

Make six observations about the text, answering who, what, when, where, why, and how.

WHO	
WHAT	
WHEN	
WHERE	
WHY	
HOW	

I find it fascinating that the girl who would eventually be healed (Jairus's daughter) was twelve years old. The bleeding woman suffered from her condition the exact duration (twelve years) the girl had been alive.

When this woman entered the picture, she had an incurable condition. Her only hope was Jesus, so she took a huge risk by approaching Him. She was ceremonially unclean, touching the only human being on earth who was constantly, perfectly clean. And instead of defiling Him in her state, He flipped the script and cleansed her, making her whole.

When has someone flipped the script on your hurt or brokenness by engaging with you? What happened? How did his or her kindness make you feel?

Read Leviticus 15:25-27.

What does the text say about this woman's condition in relation to the purity laws?

Consider the imbalance of status in this encounter. Jesus treated both a synagogue official and an unclean woman with kindness and respect. He did not prefer one to the other; in fact, He interrupted His healing journey to pay close attention to this desperate woman. The Gospel of Mark's account uses the phrase *ousa en rhusei haimatos*, meaning "in a state of blood flow."⁶ This was not a trickle, but a constant, debilitating bleed—the worst kind of heavy period that never ended.

From what we read in Scripture, how would the woman's condition have affected her everyday life?

What sort of emotions might she have experienced for twelve years?

In spite of all this, she pursued Jesus at great personal cost, but she did not approach Him from the front. The woman came up behind Jesus and gave a light touch of a tassel, a hope that healing power would bleed from Him.

According to Frank Viola, "The word for 'hem' or 'edge' in Luke is *kraspedon*,⁷ and it refers to the ritual tassels commanded by Numbers 15:38-39 and Deuteronomy 22:12. She touched the tassel on the end of the square garment thrown over Jesus' left shoulder that hung down the back. (The tassels were reminders to observant Jews of God's commandments.)"⁸

Now read Mark 5:21-34.

How does the story differ from Luke's account?

According to verse 30, how was the woman healed?

According to verse 34, what is the other factor that contributed to her healing?

When we suffer, it's important to remember to have faith in God's ability to heal, trusting in His power and strength. God is capable of such a magnificent feat, but the difficulty for us all is when He chooses not to heal, not to miraculously intervene. What do we do then? And how do we help those who share that story?

We must possess comfort as Christ followers. It is the bridge between people's pain and their healing.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

Who comforts us in our pain and worry? Why do you think so?

According to verse 5, what happens when we suffer more?

What is the point of suffering, as Paul described it in verse 6?

It's amazing our God is utterly personal, and He wants to bring us comfort. It's surprising that as our pain multiplies, God empowers us to not only endure our current trial, but He fits us with empathy so that when others suffer, we can walk alongside them.

If you have had the opportunity to help someone through pain, then describe how it felt to do so.

Why do you think God brings deep joy when you suffer alongside someone else?

Did you know that this encounter with Jesus and the woman with the issue of blood was unique? This was the only time in Scripture He called a woman His daughter. While Jairus's daughter's plight played around the corners of this story, she had a father who loved her well. But this woman appeared to have no one. Jesus, in His outrageous generosity, welcomed her as Daughter. Not a daughter, but simply Daughter. This exemplified a welcoming back into a community that had left her destitute and family-less. What a powerful example of grace Jesus gave her.

This woman personified people who suffer through no fault of their own. She did not choose her condition. She sought to be set free from it. But nonetheless, she had to endure the consequences outside of her control. Jesus gave us a beautiful pattern for how to love people in their suffering.

We turn.

We acknowledge.

We listen.

We speak healing words.

We welcome each person back to the family of God.

Pray this week the Lord will show you people to love in this way—to turn toward in their suffering, acknowledge their pain, listen to their heart, offer words of healing, and embrace them as a welcomed family member. Be alert to the possibly surprising way God will answer your prayer.

DAY THREE

IMAGO DEI

As we consider our own stories and the stories of those we love, it's important we understand theology. Theology is simply "the study of God."⁹ How we think about Him, His created world and our place in it informs everything about our daily lives.

Today, we're going to look at the term *imago dei*, which is Latin for "the image of God."¹⁰ The Hebrew term, transliterated *tzelem*, is a theological concept, which means the way God infuses dignity and special honor to those who bear His image.¹¹

Genesis 1:27 reminds us of this central truth: "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Both men and women are image bearers, and we carry the weight of God around in our mortal bodies, the immortal shining through human skin. Because of that, we all carry weight. We matter. We are worth loving, worth being pursued, and worth being healed.

According to Genesis 1:27, what percentage of humanity was created in God's image?

We are the result of a triune God's self-emptying love. Before our world took on soil, sky, oceans, and wildlife, our relational God existed in threefold mysterious relationship, hovering over the darkness, sufficient in Himself. He is love codified, a beautiful internal relationship that endeavored to create mankind from that harmony of fellowship. We are His children, and He is our divine parent. This thought is continued in the New Testament: "For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17:28).¹²

As offspring of God, every human being should be treated as the masterpiece he or she is—with dignity, protection, respect, kindness, justice, and life. Every created person is weighted with glory. No two people are alike. All have unique contributions only they can fulfill. When you encounter the death of an individual, you experience the siphoning out of one person's sweet influence. They leave a hole, and that hole can never be filled.

In light of that, how are we to live? How should we treat those who bear God’s insignia?

Consider Zechariah 7:8-12:

Then this message came to Zechariah from the LORD: “This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another. Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. And do not scheme against each other. Your ancestors refused to listen to this message. They stubbornly turned away and put their fingers in their ears to keep from hearing. They made their hearts as hard as stone, so they could not hear the instructions or the messages that the LORD of Heaven’s Armies had sent them by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. That is why the LORD of Heaven’s Armies was so angry with them.”

Why do you think Zechariah referred to God as the “LORD of Heaven’s Armies” (in other translations, He is the “LORD of Hosts”)? How does knowing that God commands angels inform this passage?

According to this passage, what are we to do and not to do? Fill it out below.

DO	DO NOT DO

What caused the exiled nation of Israel to plug her ears to God’s mandates?

Why was God furious in this passage?

Hardness of heart is a serious problem, both for the nation of Israel and for us today. With hard hearts, we desensitize to the needs of others, and we refuse to listen to the God who made them.

This is a close twin to bitterness, brought on by rebellion, yes, but also by heartache. If we have experienced heartache over and over again, and that heartache comes at the hands of those we love (or those we thought loved us), we can turn inwardly and make vows about how we will interact with the world.

Vows like:

- I will wall off my heart from everyone because no one can be trusted.
- I will limit my relationships to a small few because to risk in a new relationship is too difficult.
- I will question everyone's motives, jumping to negative intent.
- I will push God away—after all, He could have rescued me from heartache, but He did not. He is, therefore, unreliable and untrustworthy.

Have you ever made one of these vows (or a similar one)? Explain.

When we consider the powerful nature of *imago dei*, we have to understand that it extends to all—including ourselves. If it is true we are made in God's image (and that is the truth), then we, too, are worthy of respect and dignity. We, too, are loved by our Creator.

When we find ourselves in a difficult place of brokenness, we can cry out to God to heal us of that pain. Doing so gives a gift to those we love. Some may think it's selfish to take care of our hearts, but the Scripture reminds us otherwise.

Read Proverbs 4:23.

What are you tasked with in relation to your heart?

Whose responsibility is it to protect your heart?

Why do you think it is important to take care of your heart?

Why does having a healed heart matter in loving others who are also made in the image of God?

Do you have a hard time understanding that you are made in God's image and are worthy of protection? Why or why not?

Scripture describes a beautiful remedy for all of us who bear God's image.

Read Ezekiel 11:19.

What did God promise to do?

Who is the fulfillment of that promise?

Let's consider the nature of a stone. I have a little bowl of heart-shaped stones on my desk, and as I pick one up, I notice several things: it is cold, hard, and it has no life. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "According to the Word of God, man's heart is by nature like a stone; but God, through his grace, removes the stony heart and gives a heart of flesh. It is this prodigy of love, this miracle of grace, which is to engage our attention to-night."¹³

A stony heart is precisely the opposite of what we were created to be. As image bearers of God, we were created for abundant life.

Read John 10:10.

What is the purpose of a thief?

Considering that Satan is the greatest thief and the hater of every image bearer, what does he gain when we have hard hearts? How is having a hard heart a sign of our personal destruction?

On the other hand, what is Jesus' purpose?

What about your life right now exemplifies abundance and satisfaction?

Charles Spurgeon continued in his sermon about hardened hearts: "A heart of stone can bear to see its fellow creatures perish and despise their destruction; but the heart of flesh is very tender over others ... A heart of flesh would give its very life-blood if it might but snatch others from going down to the pit, for its bowels yearn and its soul moves toward its fellow sinners who are on the broad road to destruction. Have you, oh, have you such a heart of flesh as this?"¹⁴

Spurgeon said that when our hearts are exchanged from stone to flesh, by the powerful gospel-act of Jesus, we live with an entirely new perspective about God and the image bearers He created. Our eyes will be opened to the cries of the hurting. Our hearts bend toward those who need rescue. We won't be able to help our empathy spilling out into the lives of those who ache.

To love fellow image bearers, we must first have this necessary surgery, moving from stony heart to pliable one. We must surrender our need for control (yes, even in our relationships) to Jesus, walking toward those who are in need. We must understand intrinsically that we, too, are worthy of love and protection—by God and others.

This is internal work.

To be able to bear another's burdens, we must first have experienced Jesus bearing ours. Otherwise, in our own strength, we will burn out. What burdens do you need Jesus to bear for you? What are you trying to do in your own strength?

Write out a prayer of surrender, asking Jesus to renew your mind, change your heart, and empower you to love the hurting people in your life.

DAY FOUR

LIGHT

We live in a dark world.

Just as parents grieve when their children hurt each other, God must grieve when His children exploit one another, assault the helpless, and traffic children. Have you considered the grief of God as He looks upon this earth? How His heart must ache from our choices! We see the grief of God prior to the flood when the earth was filled with unrelenting violence (Gen. 6:6). God's heart throughout the history of the nation of Israel was to woo humanity back to Himself, a relationship that was forever altered in the garden when the first human beings chose the lure of knowing good and evil over relationship with the only One who was good (Gen. 3). Israel was to be a light shining in the darkness, a vehicle for bringing a broken humanity back to the One who created her.

Attention to the imagery of light reveals the story of God throughout the Testaments, and this frequent metaphor peppers the pages of Scripture. Prior to the creation of humanity, God said, "'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). Post flood, God inaugurated His first great commission when He called Abraham to leave his home and become a great nation (Gen. 12). Throughout the Old Testament, we see admonitions that this new nation was to protect the helpless, care for the poor, support the widow, and extend kindness to foreigners. This power differential that existed in the world was not intended for exploitation, but service. Those who found themselves in positions of power were to judge fairly, love widely, and create a just society. All this hinted at a future glory, when God Himself would send the Son to continue this practice publicly.¹⁵

The nation of Israel was tasked to be a light to the world. "You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). You can almost taste the groaning of God in this passage, this great unveiling of the progression of His plan of salvation. "Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the LORD rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the LORD rises and appears over you. All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see your radiance" (Isa. 60:1-3).

This light-bearing mandate prepared Israel to meet her King, Jesus. Isaiah prophesied, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine" (Isa. 9:2).

That light did shine in the person of Jesus Christ.

Read John 1:1-5.

In what ways do we see the Trinitarian nature of God in this passage?

Who brings the Light to this world?

What is the promise we find at the end of this passage? How does that give you hope today?

We can see the power of light in play in the story of the man born blind and his interaction with Jesus.

Read John 9.

Make six observations about the text, answering who, what, when, where, why, and how.

WHO	
WHAT	
WHEN	
WHERE	
WHY	
HOW	

This man's blindness is a helpful metaphor for those who are hurting. Why? Because he didn't cause his blindness. The disciples, seeking to understand the cause of his blindness, asked an insensitive question about why the man had the condition. Was it his fault? His parents? Jesus responded that it was neither of those scenarios.

Why did Jesus say the blind man was born blind?

Do you think this is true whenever Christians suffer? Why or why not?

We may never know the reason why we experience certain hurts and suffering. We, after all, cannot shed a light on human hearts, nor should we presume to know motives. Some of the most painful interactions trauma survivors experience is the questioning by well-meaning people. Sexual abuse survivors, in particular, have heard many insensitive words. They often hear questions and statements like:

- What were you wearing?
- Are you sure it happened?
- How did you contribute?
- Have you forgiven?
- Why did you put yourself in that situation?
- Why didn't you fight back?
- How come it took you so long to report?
- That was a long time ago. You should be over it by now.

We have to remember that when people are sinned against, the shame belongs to the one who perpetrated, but the victimized often internalize that shame. Through listening and asking kindhearted questions, we may become aware of the lies our friends now believe because of their pain. In a loving, non-judgmental manner we can help them see the truth—that in the midst of the pain, God still loves them. He still accepts them. He still pursues them.

This is the power of listening first, then asking questions. We cannot know what is in someone's heart, but we are more likely to understand if we stay quiet, listen to his or her story, and then tenderly ask questions as God leads. These are the kinds of conversations that change lives.

How does Jesus' healing of the man born blind encourage you?

Reread the end of the passage in John 9:35-41.

What was the man's response to learning the identity of Jesus (v. 38)?

What does Jesus equate blindness with in verse 41?

Before you met Jesus, how were you blind?

That's a perfect bridge to interact with Ephesians 5:6-14, which highlights darkness and sin:

Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do. For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

As light bearers, what is our responsibility in terms of the darkness?

We are to expose darkness, becoming like "a city on a hilltop" (Matt. 5:14), shining a beacon of hope and healing into the dark of sin. This is not an easy task or one we should take lightly.

Think about a time when you exposed the darkness about something, or perhaps you were just witness to someone else exposing darkness. What happened? How did exposing the darkness change the circumstances for those involved?

Why do you think it's difficult to expose darkness? What does it cost someone to put a spotlight on evil?

How has Jesus shed light in your life? In your relationships?

We can become overwhelmed by our problems, the darkness of this world, and the plight of others. When we do, it's important to embrace eschatological living, which simply means to live in light of what will be, when the new heaven and the new earth dawn.¹⁶

Perfect justice does not yet exist on this earth, though we try to work toward that. Perfect love is elusive. But one day, all will be well, justice will be meted out, and our tears will be wiped away. The prophet Isaiah hinted at that day:

No longer will you need the sun to shine by day, nor the moon to give its light by night, for the LORD your God will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set; your moon will not go down. For the LORD will be your everlasting light. Your days of mourning will come to an end. All your people will be righteous. They will possess their land forever, for I will plant them there with my own hands in order to bring myself glory. The smallest family will become a thousand people, and the tiniest group will become a mighty nation.

At the right time, I, the LORD, will make it happen.

ISAIAH 60:19-22

The fulfillment of that vision culminates in Revelation 21:22-25. It reads:

I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there.

One day Jesus will be all the light we need. Darkness will be vanquished.

How does reminding yourself about the future glory help you persevere today?

Why is it important to have an eternal perspective on things?

Our lives are a pinprick in time, but eternity extends forever. With an eternal perspective, our short time on earth becomes important. How we love matters. How we deal with evil and pain matters. How we expose the darkness matters.

With a proper theology of light, we remember that the darkness ultimately will not win. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of that beautiful truth. Sometimes we need to remind others.

Who comes to mind when you think of someone who is battling the darkness? Stop and say a prayer for that person today.

DAY FIVE

JESUS

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life” (John 8:12).

When we want to understand how to love the hurting in our midst, we have to look to Jesus to see how to live. He encountered many suffering people in His sojourn on earth. Even in His death, He revealed to us how to suffer well.

Jesus was both silent and loquacious when He faced torture and mocking. He stood silent in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), spotlighting His connectedness to the Suffering Servant mentioned in Isaiah 53:7—“He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth.” Yet in the Book of John, we see His response to the high priest: “Everyone knows what I teach. I have preached regularly in the synagogues and the Temple, where the people gather. I have not spoken in secret. Why are you asking me this question? Ask those who heard me. They know what I said” (John 18:20-21). Jesus went on to interact with Pilate as well.

Why bring up this distinction? Because some, horrifically, have used Jesus’ silence in the face of suffering as a prescription for abuse survivors, telling them that it is godly to keep abuse silent. The latter interactions in John undermine this argument, and if anything, Jesus’ words, “I have not spoken in secret,” refute this silencing takeaway.¹⁷

Telling our stories to safe people is the first step toward healing. Consider how many times Jesus drew out people on the margins of life. He asked questions. He listened. He was interested. This holy curiosity informed the way He loved folks as He walked the dusty roads of Jerusalem and its surrounding communities.

When have you told a difficult story to a safe person? What happened?

When has someone entrusted a painful story to you? How did you feel as they shared?

Can you recall one of the most significant conversations you've had? What happened? What made the interaction memorable?

Read John 8:1-11, the story of the woman caught in adultery.

Make six observations about the text, answering who, what, when, where, why, and how.

WHO	
WHAT	
WHEN	
WHERE	
WHY	
HOW	

Read Leviticus 20:10.

According to Old Testament law, who should be punished for adultery, and how? Why is this significant to the story above?

Whenever Jesus interacted with the broken, He surprised people. The Law indicated death for this woman, but she walked away wholly alive. And in the midst of that, the surrounding people received a poignant object lesson. Jesus is both grace and truth. We see grace as she lived, and we see truth when Jesus told her to refrain from sin from that point forward.

Jesus, the only perfect One, had the right to enact justice, but He chose a different path. He cleared the way for a brand new life of grace.

He does that for all of us. His life, death, and resurrection beckon us to a new life, a gospel-centered dance, where we are now called ambassadors, helping others have a brand new life.

Will we suffer on this earth? Yes. Will we fall? Yes. Will we face discouragement? Yes. Will people betray us? Yes. But because we have the Holy Spirit within us, we have all that we need to endure with joy.

The Book of Philippians has joy at its roots. In Philippians 2:5-8 we see the paradoxical reason for Jesus' joy. It's a Greek word: *kenosis*.¹⁸

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, *he gave up his divine privileges*; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross” (emphasis mine).

Though God, Jesus didn't accept the privileges that came with being God. Instead, He let go of those privileges for the sake of giving us a tangible example of love. To love another is to pour out. To love is to consider someone else more important than ourselves. To love is to lay down our lives and serve another's interests. Think about the audacity of *kenosis* for a moment. In a world where men and women claw their way to power and prominence, Jesus, who already had it, gloriously let it go.¹⁹

How does understanding the *kenosis* of Jesus empower you to serve someone who is struggling?

Read Luke 19:1-10 about Zacchaeus.

Who was Zacchaeus? What had he done before meeting Jesus?

Zacchaeus could be considered a predatory person before he met Jesus. He preyed upon the less fortunate to line his own pockets, causing hurt, poverty, and suffering.

Why do you think Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus?

What does restoration look like in this passage?

Zacchaeus promised to change. How do we know he truly changed?

We don't see Zacchaeus give all his money back in this passage of Scripture. However, we know from the One who sees our hearts and knows our minds that Zacchaeus had truly changed. Repentance that is merely words is not repentance at all. Repentance has teeth. It restores. It not only admits wrong, but it seeks to right those wrongs. This is vitally important to understand for two reasons:

1. Predatory people are very good at saying Christian words but seldom back those words up with restorative action. We must become better at discerning them.
2. Those who have been harmed may feel a predatory person's words are confusing. They may need your help in unpacking their emotions and worries. So often they've been told to forgive quickly without any measurable repentance.

Repentance in word only is empty.

Repentance with right action over a period of time indicates that there is a possibility that relationship can be restored.

Recall a time when someone's words of repentance (I'm sorry) were not followed by restorative action. How did that make you feel? What happened in the long term?

What does the story of Zacchaeus teach you about a changed life?

In the case of Zacchaeus, there is no doubt about his repentance. In this moment, his words matched his actions, and those actions were extreme. This is why Jesus said salvation has come to his house and life. As people who want to bear the weight of another's story, we can look to this passage for hope; it is possible for people to experience life change.

Jesus, the Light of the world, was curious about others. He helped those who were hurting share their stories. He offered a grace-infused response to those who struggled. He emptied Himself of rightful fame in order to identify with us. He revealed what a life changed by the gospel looked like in His interaction with Zacchaeus. Because of this, we do not have to wander aimlessly as we strive (through the power of the Holy Spirit) to love others. We have a roadmap, and not only that, but Jesus beautifully walked that map. His tangible example of love pouring out empowers us to pour out His love on others. What a privilege!

THIS WEEK'S WE TOO MOMENT

Each week you'll see a "We Too Moment" to help you act on what you've learned throughout the week of study. These are optional, but I hope they'll bless you as you are challenged.

Read Matthew 5:3-10.

God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

God blesses those who are humble,
for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they will be satisfied.

God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure,
for they will see God.

God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses you when people mock you, and persecute you, and lie about you, and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are His followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

Now read this wearing the lens of someone in your life who is suffering.

How does seeing this passage through his or her eyes change your experience of Jesus' words?

ACTION: Choose one of these verses, or perhaps the whole passage, write it out, and send it to a struggling friend. (And yes, I mean a card, an envelope, a stamp, and the mail.)

EXAMPLE: "I was reading through the Sermon on the Mount this week, and verse 4 stood out to me: "God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted." It reminded me of your grief of late, and how difficult it must be for you as you mourn what was lost. This verse reminds us both that comfort will come. I pray it will arrive tangibly this week. I'm so sorry for what you've been walking through, and I wish I could take it all away from you (and I'm sure you would rather not be walking through it). May God's comfort put breath back into your lungs. Please know I am praying toward that end. I love you, [NAME]."

NOTES