

Living Life with a Capital “L”

*Words of Encouragement
Between Friends*

by Eric Elder

Living Life with a Capital "L"
Words of Encouragement Between Friends
Copyright © 2021 Eric Elder
All rights reserved.

21 devotions from Eric Elder, based on the various stories about Jesus as told by His friend John, quoted from various translations of the Bible.

Special thanks to my friends in the Online Men's Group (OMG!) who went through these lessons with me—enhancing the book and my life—with a special dedication to Supri Lase, who lived his life to the full.
(1997-2021)

Cover photo of Eric Elder taken on Christmas Day, 2020,
by Makari Elder at Bible Point, YMCA of the Rockies

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 1973 1978 1984 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified® Bible (AMP), Copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission. www.lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from *THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language* copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. Used by permission of NavPress. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from *The Holy Bible*, New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 Thomas Nelson.
All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-931760-88-1

Table of Contents

Introduction: Living Life to the Full	5
Chapter 1 (NIV): In Him Was Life.....	9
Chapter 2 (NLT): You Have Saved the Best Till Now	15
Chapter 3 (AMP): Whoever Believes in the Son has Eternal Life	19
Chapter 4 (MSG): A Spring of Water Welling Up to Eternal Life.....	23
Chapter 5 (NKJV): The Father... Shows Him All He Does	30
Chapter 6 (NIV): I Am the Bread of Life.....	35
Chapter 7 (NLT): Streams of Living Water Will Flow from Within	42
Chapter 8 (AMP): Go Now and Leave Your Life of Sin	48
Chapter 9 (MSG): You Have Now Seen Him	54
Chapter 10 (NKJV): I Have Come that They May Have Life	60
Chapter 11 (NIV): I Am the Resurrection and the Life.....	65
Chapter 12 (NLT): The Man Who Loves His Life Will Lose It.....	71
Chapter 13 (AMP): I Will Lay Down My Life for You	77
Chapter 14 (MSG): I Am the Way and the Truth and the Life.....	82
Chapter 15 (NKJV): Apart from Me You Can Do Nothing	87
Chapter 16 (NIV): He Will Guide You into All Truth	91
Chapter 17 (NLT): Now This is Eternal Life	96
Chapter 18 (AMP): My Kingdom is Not of this World	100
Chapter 19 (MSG): It is Finished.....	106
Chapter 20 (NKJV): By Believing You May Have Life in His Name....	112
Chapter 21 (NIV): Follow Me.....	117
Conclusion: Jesus Did Many Other Things as Well	123

Introduction: Living Life to the Full

When I lost my wife of 23 years, I had a choice to make: I could lose myself in despair or keep living my life to the full. I was tempted many times to lose myself in despair.

But I also had to remember that God had given me a life for a reason. And if I was still alive, He still had plans for me. My hope was that God would show me what those plans were.

I was faced with choices continually.

When I wanted to go see a movie but couldn't go with Lana and didn't want to go with anyone else, I had to choose whether to stay home or go alone. I chose to go and laughed and cried and stood up and cheered even, because I was the only one in the theater.

When I wanted to say, "I can't raise my kids like this. I can't be both mom and dad," I had to choose whether I'd give up and give in or lean into who God created me to be. I couldn't be both mom and dad, but I could be the best dad I could be.

When my dance teacher from childhood invited me into her classroom to dance again as she was now teaching my daughter, I protested, both internally and externally. How could I possibly dance when I was hurting so badly? But how could I say no to my sweet seventy-two-year-old dance teacher? I chose to go in and dance in my socks... laughing the whole hour (and the rest of the year),

as I watched my fifty-year-old belly bounce up and down in the wall-sized mirror.

One day, on a bus ride to the airport, the bus driver gave me a little booklet. It was a pocket-sized *Gospel of John* from the Bible. The driver probably didn't know I was a Christian. He probably didn't know I was a pastor. And he probably didn't know I had lost the love of my life.

But what he *did* know was that the words of God contained in that little book from the Bible could bring life to *anyone* in *any* situation at *any* time.

The truth is *everyone, everywhere, at all times has needs*. I began reading that little book that day and carried it with me for the next several months, pulling it out again and again to read whenever I had a few minutes.

That first time I read through it, I underlined every passage that talked about John's intimacy with Jesus. I was struck by the fact of how close they were. I wanted that kind of intimacy, and Jesus offered it to me, just like He offered it to John.

The second time I read through it, I underlined every passage that talked about conflict, and how Jesus resolved it whenever He encountered it. I learned that sometimes He engaged it and sometimes walked away, depending on His goal in each situation.

The third time I read through it, I underlined every passage that talked about life and living life to the fullest. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Jesus never married yet had a full life. He was beaten and ridiculed yet accomplished all He came

do. I wanted that kind of life... a full life... an abundant life... Life with a capital "L."

There are times when I could still slip into despair. But Jesus always offers me a hand, just like He did when Peter was sinking in the sea. He always invites me to make a choice: to sink deeper on my own or to take His hand and let Him lift me up.

Everyone, everywhere, at all times has needs. What about you? What do you need today? I invite you to read through the *Gospel of John* with me. Let Jesus lift you up. He came that you may have life, and have it to the full... Life with a capital "L."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Elder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Eric" on the top line and "Elder" on the bottom line.

P.S. I've included in this book all the stories that John told about Jesus, chapter by chapter. At the end of each chapter, I've included a few thoughts of my own. I've left space for you to write a few of your thoughts, too!

*"I have come that they may have life,
and have it to the full."*

Chapter 1 (NIV): In Him Was Life

(Stories about Jesus as told by His friend John)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes

after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ ” Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”

They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’ ”

Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven

open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

My Thoughts

I've heard people say, "Jesus is all you need."

I used to think, "How can that be? I'm human and I need all kinds of things... food, water, friendship, intimacy, health, finances."

But then I remembered everything I have comes from Him. As John says, "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life..."

Now, when I hear people say, "Jesus is all you need," I get it! Everything I have DOES come from Him! Lana, my kids, my food, my friends, my finances, my health... they ALL came from Him! Jesus really is all I need... because everything comes from Him!

What do you need today? Come to Him.

John tells us Jesus said the same to two disciples. Jesus saw them following Him, so He turned and asked, "What do you want?"

They told Him and Jesus said, "Come, and you will see."

John says they went and spent the day with Him. Wow! What I wouldn't give to spend a day with Jesus! And the truth is, I can! He invites me to come and spend the day with Him every day. Every day. Every day.

Sometimes we don't realize that Jesus is all we need until Jesus is all we have. Then the truth becomes clear.

“What do you want? Come, and you will see.”

Spend a day with Jesus. He has everything you need.

“In Him was life...”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 2 (NLT): You Have Saved the Best Till Now

The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled, he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So the servants followed his instructions.

When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!"

This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me."

But the Jewish leaders demanded, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it."

"All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

"What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew

all about people. No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person's heart.

My Thoughts

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus really was the "Life" of the party! When the wine ran out, He gave them more!

How did it happen? Jesus' mother said, "Do whatever He tells you."

She knew. She knew what He could do. Perhaps she had seen Him do it before, maybe at home.

If you run out of something, where can you go? Go to Jesus. Then do whatever He tells you.

Amazingly, He not only turned the water into wine, but he turned it into *better* wine. And I imagine the first wine was already pretty amazing because this was a special event and, as the master of the banquet said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first." So the first wine, the choice wine, was *already* good! But the second wine... the master said it was even better.

After losing Lana, I wondered if I would ever get remarried, and how that marriage could possibly compare to the good marriage I already had. Then I heard about an elderly man who got remarried later in life. He told a friend of mine, "My first wife got the younger me. My second wife got the better me." Hopefully, we all get better with age, too.

After 23 years of marriage, I hope I had become a better husband to Lana. So perhaps it's possible that there

will be another wonderful wife for me in the future who got better with age, too!

Trust Jesus to turn water into wine for you, too. And not just any wine... but the best.

"... you have saved the best till now."

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 3 (AMP): Whoever Believes in the Son has Eternal Life

Now there was a certain man among the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews, who came to Jesus at night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered him, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, unless a person is born again, he cannot see and experience the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born, can he?”

Jesus answered, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised that I have told you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it is coming from and where it is going; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be possible?”

Jesus replied, “You are the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not know nor understand these things? I assure you and most solemnly say to you, we speak only of what we know and testify about what we have seen; and you

do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe and trust Me if I tell you heavenly things? No one has gone up into heaven, but there is One who came down from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

“For God so loved and dearly prized the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes and trusts in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge and condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes and has decided to trust in Him is not judged; but the one who does not believe is judged already, because he has not believed and trusted in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment: the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For every wrongdoer hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his activities will be exposed and condemned. But whoever practices truth comes to the Light, so that his works may be plainly shown to be what they are—accomplished in God.”

My Thoughts

If we want an abundant life, Jesus tells us where to start: “You must be born again.” That’s the best way to get a new life, a fresh start.

Perhaps you've already been born again. Perhaps you've been a believer a long time, but have lost that feeling of new life, that joy, that peace.

I once counseled a woman going through a very difficult time. She was headed for divorce and discouraged on all fronts. I prayed with her, reminding her of all God's promises when she first put her faith in Christ. I reminded her it was all still true and still available to her. She had just lost sight of it.

After our prayer, she got her faith back and said, "I feel like I've been born again... again!"

That's not a typo. She truly felt like she had been born again... AGAIN!

If you don't like the way you were born initially, there's good news! You can be born again!

And if you've already been born again, remind yourself where new life, abundant life, eternal life begins. Ask Jesus to revive you, to give you a fresh start, to be born again... AGAIN!

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life..."

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 4 (MSG): A Spring of Water Welling Up to Eternal Life

Jesus realized that the Pharisees were keeping count of the baptisms that he and John performed (although his disciples, not Jesus, did the actual baptizing). They had posted the score that Jesus was ahead, turning him and John into rivals in the eyes of the people. So Jesus left the Judean countryside and went back to Galilee.

To get there, he had to pass through Samaria. He came into Sychar, a Samaritan village that bordered the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was still there. Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well. It was noon.

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.”

The woman said, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever get thirsty, won’t ever have to come back to this well again!”

He said, “Go call your husband and then come back.”

“I have no husband,” she said.

“That’s nicely put: ‘I have no husband.’ You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with now isn’t even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough.”

“Oh, so you’re a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?”

“Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God’s way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you’re called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being it-

self—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”

The woman said, “I don’t know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.”

“I am he,” said Jesus. “You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.”

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn’t believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it.

The woman took the hint and left. In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, “Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?” And they went out to see for themselves.

In the meantime, the disciples pressed him, “Rabbi, eat. Aren’t you going to eat?”

He told them, “I have food to eat you know nothing about.”

The disciples were puzzled. “Who could have brought him food?”

Jesus said, “The food that keeps me going is that I do the will of the One who sent me, finishing the work he started. As you look around right now, wouldn’t you say that in about four months it will be time to harvest? Well, I’m telling you to open your eyes and take a good look at

what's right in front of you. These Samaritan fields are ripe. It's harvest time!

"The Harvester isn't waiting. He's taking his pay, gathering in this grain that's ripe for eternal life. Now the Sower is arm in arm with the Harvester, triumphant. That's the truth of the saying, 'This one sows, that one harvests.' I sent you to harvest a field you never worked. Without lifting a finger, you have walked in on a field worked long and hard by others."

Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman's witness: "He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!" They asked him to stay on, so Jesus stayed two days. A lot more people entrusted their lives to him when they heard what he had to say. They said to the woman, "We're no longer taking this on your say-so. We've heard it for ourselves and know it for sure. He's the Savior of the world!"

After the two days he left for Galilee. Now, Jesus knew well from experience that a prophet is not respected in the place where he grew up. So when he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, but only because they were impressed with what he had done in Jerusalem during the Passover Feast, not that they really had a clue about who he was or what he was up to.

Now he was back in Cana of Galilee, the place where he made the water into wine. Meanwhile in Capernaum, there was a certain official from the king's court whose son was sick. When he heard that Jesus had come from

Judea to Galilee, he went and asked that he come down and heal his son, who was on the brink of death. Jesus put him off: "Unless you people are dazzled by a miracle, you refuse to believe."

But the court official wouldn't be put off. "Come down! It's life or death for my son."

Jesus simply replied, "Go home. Your son lives."

The man believed the bare word Jesus spoke and headed home. On his way back, his servants intercepted him and announced, "Your son lives!"

He asked them what time he began to get better. They said, "The fever broke yesterday afternoon at one o'clock." The father knew that that was the very moment Jesus had said, "Your son lives."

That settled it. Not only he but his entire household believed. This was now the second sign Jesus gave after having come from Judea into Galilee.

My Thoughts

Can you imagine Jesus asking *you* for a drink? He was God, yet in the flesh, He needed food, water, sleep... and a drink.

As I thought about this, I felt God asking me, "Eric, will *you* give me a drink?"

"What would you like, Lord?" I said.

"A cup of your love."

A cup of my love.

What would that look like? I wondered. I thought of my piano music. My praise. My prayer. My love. This was what I thought I could offer Him. You have other things you can offer.

“Worship Me in spirit and in truth,” God said. “That would be the drink I would love to drink. And I will pour out on you, Eric, Living Water. Water teeming with Life. A spring welling up to Eternal Life. Your praise primes the pump and provides the drink I need to then pour out Life on you. You’ll then have fountains, wells, and springs bubbling up to overflowing.”

What if Jesus asked *you* for a drink? What would you give Him? Offer Him your drink today and watch as He pours out Life on you.

“The water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 5 (NKJV): The Father... Shows Him All He Does

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'"

Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" But the one who was

healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming,

and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

“If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

“I do not receive honor from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

My Thoughts

Fathers show their children what they do.

As I thought about this, I felt God saying, “Eric, I want you to give Life to your children. Show them what you do. Show them your books, your music, your website. Show them they can *have life* and *give life* to others, as I have given it to you.

“Know that I *love you* and *show you* what I do. Show them, Eric. Show them what you do, and perhaps they will do it, too.”

I write books. I write music. I write my thoughts in journals. And I help others do the same. Children have free will to do what they want to do and what God calls them to do. But sometimes He calls them to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before them.

God wanted to heal a man, and He showed Jesus what He wanted to do. So Jesus asked the man, "Do you want to get well?"

Jesus was amazing in His own right, but He was also amazing because He did what His Father showed Him to do. God didn't just tell Jesus. He showed Him.

“Show them,” God said. “Show them all you do.”

As I do what God shows me, and I show others what I do, we can multiply God's life-giving work.

“For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 6 (NIV): I Am the Bread of Life

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve bas-

kets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink."

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

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

Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the

son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

My Thoughts

When Jesus asked the disciples to give food to the people, He already had an idea of what He wanted to do. He wanted to give them bread to eat to draw them closer to Him. But even more, He wanted them to come to Him for Life, not just bread.

“I am the bread of life,” Jesus said. “He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.”

When I read that, I felt God saying to me, “Seek Me, Eric, believe Me, and you will never go hungry, never be thirsty. I care about your physical needs. I multiplied bread and wasted none. Yet I care even more about your spiritual needs, which are deeper still. Let Me meet those, too, Eric. Let Me meet them in those holes in your heart. You long for love, but only I can fill those holes. Look to Me to fill them, first and foremost. In Me you will find Life. I alone can fill that deep, deep, need. I am the bread you truly seek. And My Spirit will give you Life.”

“I am the bread of life...”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 7 (NLT): **Streams of Living Water Will Flow from Within**

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" For even his brothers didn't believe in him.

Jesus replied, "Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime. The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil. You go on. I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come." After saying these things, Jesus remained in Galilee.

But after his brothers left for the festival, Jesus also went, though secretly, staying out of public view. The Jewish leaders tried to find him at the festival and kept asking if anyone had seen him. There was a lot of grumbling about him among the crowds. Some argued, "He's a good man," but others said, "He's nothing but a fraud who deceives the people." But no one had the courage to speak favorably about him in public, for they were afraid of getting in trouble with the Jewish leaders.

Then, midway through the festival, Jesus went up to the Temple and began to teach. The people were sur-

prised when they heard him. "How does he know so much when he hasn't been trained?" they asked.

So Jesus told them, "My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me. Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own. Those who speak for themselves want glory only for themselves, but a person who seeks to honor the one who sent him speaks truth, not lies. Moses gave you the law, but none of you obeys it! In fact, you are trying to kill me."

The crowd replied, "You're demon possessed! Who's trying to kill you?"

Jesus replied, "I did one miracle on the Sabbath, and you were amazed. But you work on the Sabbath, too, when you obey Moses' law of circumcision. (Actually, this tradition of circumcision began with the patriarchs, long before the law of Moses.) For if the correct time for circumcising your son falls on the Sabbath, you go ahead and do it so as not to break the law of Moses. So why should you be angry with me for healing a man on the Sabbath? Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly."

Some of the people who lived in Jerusalem started to ask each other, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? But here he is, speaking in public, and they say nothing to him. Could our leaders possibly believe that he is the Messiah? But how could he be? For we know where this man comes from. When the Messiah comes, he will simply appear; no one will know where he comes from."

While Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he called out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I come from. But I'm not here on my own. The one who sent me is true, and you don't know him. But I know him because I come from him, and he sent me to you." Then the leaders tried to arrest him; but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.

Many among the crowds at the Temple believed in him. "After all," they said, "would you expect the Messiah to do more miraculous signs than this man has done?"

When the Pharisees heard that the crowds were whispering such things, they and the leading priests sent Temple guards to arrest Jesus. But Jesus told them, "I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will return to the one who sent me. You will search for me but not find me. And you cannot go where I am going."

The Jewish leaders were puzzled by this statement. "Where is he planning to go?" they asked. "Is he thinking of leaving the country and going to the Jews in other lands? Maybe he will even teach the Greeks! What does he mean when he says, 'You will search for me but not find me,' and 'You cannot go where I am going'?"

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to every-

one believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

When the crowds heard him say this, some of them declared, "Surely this man is the Prophet we've been expecting." Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others said, "But he can't be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born." So the crowd was divided about him. Some even wanted him arrested, but no one laid a hand on him.

When the Temple guards returned without having arrested Jesus, the leading priests and Pharisees demanded, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

"We have never heard anyone speak like this!" the guards responded.

"Have you been led astray, too?" the Pharisees mocked. "Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him? This foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law. God's curse is on them!"

Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked.

They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!"

Then the meeting broke up, and everybody went home.

My Thoughts

Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this He meant the Spirit.

Jesus says if we believe in Him, streams of living water will flow from within us. But many of us are producing only a trickle. Why?

As I prayed about this, God brought to mind a message I was about to give, a message that might not be received well. I was fearful what the reaction might be. Yet maybe my fear was holding back the Living Water that God wanted to pour out through me.

I felt God say, “Don’t speak to gain honor for yourself, but for Me. People will try to kill you for what you say. Do it anyway, as it brings honor to Me.”

I felt Jesus say, “I fought the fear of death daily, escaped from it regularly, and spoke in the face of it occasionally, trusting My Father would guide Me and many would put their faith in Him.”

If you’re thirsty, come to Him and drink. Then pour it out to others, without fear and watch as God’s Spirit flows like streams.

“Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within Him.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 8 (AMP): Go Now and Leave Your Life of Sin

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came back into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him. He sat down and began teaching them. Now the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. They made her stand in the center of the court, and they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the very act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do You say?” They said this to test Him, hoping that they would have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and began writing on the ground with His finger. However, when they persisted in questioning Him, He straightened up and said, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then He stooped down again and started writing on the ground. They listened, and they began to go out one by one, starting with the oldest ones, until He was left alone, with the woman in the center of the court. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” She answered, “No one, Lord!” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you either. Go. From now on sin no more.”

Once more Jesus addressed the crowd. He said, “I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” Then the Pharisees told Him, “You are testifying on Your own be-

half; Your testimony is not valid." Jesus replied, "Even if I do testify on My own behalf, My testimony is valid, because I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to human standards. I do not judge anyone. But even if I do judge, My judgment is true and My decision is right; for I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent Me. Even in your own law it is written that the testimony of two persons is true. I am One who testifies about Myself, and My Father who sent Me testifies about Me." Then the Pharisees said to Him, "Where is this Father of Yours?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also." Jesus said these things in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His time had not yet come.

Then He said again to them, "I am going away, and you will look for Me, and you will die [unforgiven and condemned] in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." So the Jews were asking, "Will He kill Himself? Is that why He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am the One, you will die in your sins." So they said to Him, "Who are You?" Jesus replied, "What have I been saying to you from the beginning? I have many things to say and judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I say to the world the things that I

have heard from Him.” They did not realize that He was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know then that I am He, and that I do nothing on My own authority, but I say these things just as My Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, because I always do what pleases Him.” As He said these things, many believed in Him.

So Jesus was saying to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word you are truly My disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been enslaved to anyone. What do You mean by saying, ‘You will be set free’?”

Jesus answered, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, everyone who practices sin habitually is a slave of sin. Now the slave does not remain in a household forever; the son [of the master] does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, then you are unquestionably free. I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you plan to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I tell the things that I have seen at My Father’s side; so you also do the things that you heard from your father.”

They answered, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, then do the works of Abraham and follow his example. But as it is, you want to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God. This is not the way Abraham acted. You are doing the works of your father.” They said to Him, “We

are not illegitimate children; we have one Father: God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love and recognize Me, for I came from God and have arrived here. For I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you misunderstand what I am saying? It is because you are unable to hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and it is your will to practice the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks what is natural to him, for he is a liar and the father of lies and half-truths. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? Whoever is of God and belongs to Him hears God’s words; for this reason you do not hear them: because you are not of God and you are not in fellowship with Him.”

The Jews answered Him, “Are we not right when we say You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon. On the contrary, I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. However, I am not seeking glory for Myself. There is One who seeks and judges. I assure you and most solemnly say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will indeed never, ever see and experience death.” The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and also the prophets; yet You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never, ever taste of death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too! Whom do You make

Yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' Yet you do not know Him, but I know Him fully. If I said I did not know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day. He saw it and was delighted." Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not even fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham?" Jesus replied, "I assure you and most solemnly say to you, before Abraham was born, I Am." So they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus concealed Himself and left the temple.

My Thoughts

Jesus showed grace to the woman caught in adultery. Then He told her, "Go now and leave your life of sin."

To have life, not death, we have to leave our lives of sin. Abundant life and a life of sin don't mix. We might feel we can have both. But sin always robs us of life, true life. When we leave it, abundant life follows.

When God confronted me with my sins, I didn't know all the ramifications of them. All I knew was if God said not to do something, and I did it, it wouldn't go well for me.

I didn't even know some of the things I was doing were sinful. But when I asked Him to show me, He did. And when I gave them up, I found new life.

If you want Life, ask God what you might need to give up in order to give it. He'll tell you! As Jesus said, "He who belongs to God hears what God says."

The woman caught in adultery was about to die for her sins. So was I. But Jesus didn't come to condemn us. He came to save us. He wants us to live.

And just like He said to the woman He said to me, "Go now and leave your life of sin." He freed her and me from death, so we could live... truly live.

“Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 9 (MSG): You Have Now Seen Him

Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?”

Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the work-day is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world’s Light.”

He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man’s eyes, and said, “Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “Sent”). The man went and washed—and saw.

Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, “Why, isn’t this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?”

Others said, “It’s him all right!”

But others objected, “It’s not the same man at all. It just looks like him.”

He said, “It’s me, the very one.”

They said, “How did your eyes get opened?”

“A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed, I saw.”

“So where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, “He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see.”

Some of the Pharisees said, “Obviously, this man can’t be from God. He doesn’t keep the Sabbath.”

Others countered, “How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?” There was a split in their ranks.

They came back at the blind man, “You’re the expert. He opened your eyes. What do you say about him?”

He said, “He is a prophet.”

The Jews didn’t believe it, didn’t believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?”

His parents said, “We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But we don’t know how he came to see—haven’t a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don’t you ask him? He’s a grown man and can speak for himself.” (His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. That’s why his parents said, “Ask him. He’s a grown man.”)

They called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind—and told him, “Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor.”

He replied, “I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind...I now see.”

They said, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

“I’ve told you over and over and you haven’t listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?”

With that they jumped all over him. “You might be a disciple of that man, but we’re disciples of Moses. We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from.”

The man replied, “This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It’s well known that God isn’t at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn’t come from God, he wouldn’t be able to do anything.”

They said, “You’re nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!” Then they threw him out in the street.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

The man said, “Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him.”

Jesus said, “You’re looking right at him. Don’t you recognize my voice?”

“Master, I believe,” the man said, and worshiped him.

Jesus then said, “I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.”

Some Pharisees overheard him and said, “Does that mean you’re calling us blind?”

Jesus said, “If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you’re accountable for every fault and failure.”

My Thoughts

Jesus wants to bring you life. Just like He wants to bring you healing.

In the case of the man born blind, Jesus spit on the ground, made a paste of mud, and put it on the man’s eyes. *That’s odd*, I thought! Giving a man new eyes with a paste of mud. But I suppose it shouldn’t be surprising when God made a whole man out of dirt! God is the One who breathes life into that which is lifeless.

All healing comes from heaven, just as all life comes from heaven.

When asked who healed him, the blind man answered three times: "I don't know." Yet the questioners still asked him a fourth time! To which the man replied, "Do you want to become His disciples, too?" Their persistent questions seemed to lead to no other conclusion! Even though he didn't know who healed him, he did know one thing: "I was blind but now I see."

After he was healed, Jesus found him again and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The blind man wanted to know who that was so he could believe in Him.

"You have now seen Him; in fact, He is the one speaking with you," Jesus said.

I love that Jesus said, "You have now seen Him." This man who was blind since birth, who had never seen *anything* in his life, now saw Jesus with new eyes.

Come to Jesus, who gave you life. Do what He tells you and let Him heal you. Like the blind man, you'll say: "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see."

*"You have now seen Him; in fact, He is
the one speaking with you."*

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 10 (NKJV): I Have Come that They May Have Life

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the

sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?”

Others said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to

snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?"

The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true." And many believed in Him there.

My Thoughts

As I read this passage, I felt both their sting and the joy of Jesus' words in the middle: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

I had been on the receiving end of "the thief's" activity, and trying to regain my footing to once again stand in the full life that Jesus promised. While some people tried to stone Jesus for what He was saying, others were putting their full faith in Him: "And in that place many believed in Jesus."

"Don't believe Me," Jesus said, "unless I do what My Father says."

As I read this, I felt Jesus saying, "Eric, believe Me. Have faith in Me. Have confidence in Me."

"Okay, Lord," I said.

I had been praying about two very different, but very important things in my life, both of which had run their course and were now out of my hands.

God reminded me of a time when I had broken up with Lana, then later wanted to get back together with her, but Lana said she couldn't. Not right then, anyway. I had to leave it up to God then, too, regardless of how it worked out.

"Leave these other issues to Me, too," Jesus said. "You've done your role. Now let Me do Mine. Believe Me, Eric. Have faith in Me. Have confidence in Me."

So I did.

Jesus came that we would have life and have it to the full. Even when the thief does what he does best, we can trust Jesus to do what He does best.

“I have come that they may have life...”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 11 (NIV): I Am the Resurrection and the Life

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the ben-

efit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a re-

gion near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

My Thoughts

Nothing says “Life” more than a literal resurrection from the dead!

“I am the resurrection and the life,” Jesus said. Then He proved it, bringing back from the dead someone He loved very much.

“Lord,” His disciples said, “the one You loved is sick.”

Believe Jesus when He says He’ll raise you to life, too. For you, too, are one He loves.

Don’t think He doesn’t love you if He doesn’t show up when you think He should. Sometimes He stays where He is for our own good.

I wept when Lana died. It’s comforting to know Jesus wept for someone He loved, too. I’ve wept when I’ve lost other things that are precious to me.

Whatever Jesus does, it’s for your good. He loves you. Remember: Jesus gave up His life so you could live.

There's nothing He wouldn't do for you to have an abundant life. So don't be afraid. He loves you very much.

“I am the resurrection and the life.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 12 (NLT): The Man Who Loves His Life Will Lose It

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

*“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey’s colt.”*

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single

seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

*“Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord
been revealed?”*

For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

*“He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn—and I would heal them.”*

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very

words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

My Thoughts

The paradoxes of Jesus are both intriguing and perplexing. They make so much sense, yet are still difficult to grasp.

How can anything about death possibly be good? Yet Jesus said, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

Having grown up on a farm, this makes perfect sense to me. Each stalk of corn typically produces only one ear of corn. But when that ear dries up, dies, and falls to the ground, the next year a hundred stalks of corn shoot up in its place, one for every kernel of corn on the ear. The death of the corn produces literally a hundred times as much grain.

Losing someone you love often seems like it could have never yield fruit. However, I've spent a quarter of a century studying the life of St. Nicholas, a man who lived back in the 3rd and 4th century. Although he had no wife and no children of his own, he continues to touch the world and a world full of children over the course of many centuries.

I felt Jesus asking me, "Would you rather have the world or a wife."

"A wife," I replied truthfully. "But I know You might want me to have the world," I acknowledged.

Then I added, "I'd like to have both." :)

A wife or the world? I'd like both. But I'll trust Him, either way. And I have to remember: some things must die so other things can live.

“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 13 (AMP): I Will Lay Down My Life for You

Now before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that His hour had come for Him to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. It was during supper, when the devil had already put betraying Jesus into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that Jesus, knowing that the Father had put everything into His hands, and that He had come from God and was returning to God, got up from supper, took off His robe, and taking a towel, He tied it around His waist.

Then He poured water into the basin and began washing the disciples' feet and wiping them with the towel which was tied around His waist. When He came to Simon Peter, he said to Him, "Lord, are You going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied to him, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but you will understand it later." Peter said to Him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "Anyone who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, and is completely clean. And you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who was going to betray Him; for that reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when He had washed their feet and put on His robe and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do

you understand what I have done for you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right in doing so, for that is who I am. So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet as well. For I gave you an example, so that you should do as I did to you. I assure you and most solemnly say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you put them into practice. I am not speaking of all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but in order that the Scripture may be fulfilled: 'He who eats My bread has raised up his heel against Me.' From now on I am telling you before it occurs, so that when it does take place you may believe that I am He. I assure you and most solemnly say to you, the one who receives and welcomes whomever I send receives Me; and the one who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

After Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "I assure you and most solemnly say to you, one of you will betray Me and hand Me over." The disciples began looking at one another, puzzled and disturbed as to whom He could mean. One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved, was leaning against Jesus' chest. So Simon Peter motioned to him and asked of whom He was speaking. Then leaning back against Jesus' chest, he asked Him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I am going to give this piece after I have dipped it." So when He had dipped the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. After

Judas had taken the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." But no one reclining at the table knew why He said this to him. Some thought that, since Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he was to give something to the poor. After taking the piece of bread, he went out immediately; and it was night.

So when Judas had left, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him at once. Little children, I am with you a little longer. You will look for Me and, as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, 'Where I am going, you are not able to come.' I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love and unselfish concern for one another."

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow Me now; but you will be able to follow later." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why cannot I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You!" Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? I assure you and most solemnly say to you, before a rooster crows you will deny and completely disown Me three times.

My Thoughts

I had a friend who was about to get a divorce. I called to see what was happening. His wife wanted to move to another city and he wanted to stay where they were.

“Would you die for your wife?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“Would you live for her, too?” I asked.

He considered the question over the next few months, eventually putting his faith in Jesus and moving to the other city with his wife.

Jesus washed the disciples' feet to show them the full extent of His love. He knew He was about to give up His life for them. He wanted to live for them, too, leaving us an example to do the same.

What would you do for others if you knew your time was at its end?

I've heard it said, “If you were going to die soon and had only one phone call you could make, who would you call and what would you say? And why are you waiting?”

“I will lay down my life for you.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 14 (MSG): **I Am the Way and the Truth and the Life**

“Don’t let this rattle you. You trust God, don’t you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father’s home. If that weren’t so, would I have told you that I’m on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I’m on my way to get your room ready, I’ll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I’m taking.”

Thomas said, “Master, we have no idea where you’re going. How do you expect us to know the road?”

Jesus said, “I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him. You’ve even seen him!”

Philip said, “Master, show us the Father; then we’ll be content.”

“You’ve been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don’t understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, ‘Where is the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren’t mere words. I don’t just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act.

“Believe me: I am in my Father and my Father is in me. If you can’t believe that, believe what you see—these works. The person who trusts me will not only do what I’m doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the

Father, am giving you the same work to do that I've been doing. You can count on it. From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I'll do it. That's how the Father will be seen for who he is in the Son. I mean it. Whatever you request in this way, I'll do.

"If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be in you!

"I will not leave you orphaned. I'm coming back. In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you're going to see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive. At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father, and you're in me, and I'm in you.

"The person who knows my commandments and keeps them, that's who loves me. And the person who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and make myself plain to him."

Judas (not Iscariot) said, "Master, why is it that you are about to make yourself plain to us but not to the world?"

"Because a loveless world," said Jesus, "is a sightless world. If anyone loves me, he will carefully keep my word

and my Father will love him—we'll move right into the neighborhood! Not loving me means not keeping my words. The message you are hearing isn't mine. It's the message of the Father who sent me.

"I'm telling you these things while I'm still living with you. The Friend, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will make everything plain to you. He will remind you of all the things I have told you. I'm leaving you well and whole. That's my parting gift to you. Peace. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left—feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught.

"You've heard me tell you, 'I'm going away, and I'm coming back.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I'm on my way to the Father because the Father is the goal and purpose of my life.

"I've told you this ahead of time, before it happens, so that when it does happen, the confirmation will deepen your belief in me. I'll not be talking with you much more like this because the chief of this godless world is about to attack. But don't worry—he has nothing on me, no claim on me. But so the world might know how thoroughly I love the Father, I am carrying out my Father's instructions right down to the last detail.

"Get up. Let's go. It's time to leave here."

My Thoughts

When Jesus left His disciples, He knew it would be bittersweet for them. Bitter for the loss, sweet for the return.

They didn't understand the *fullness* of what He was telling them. Their grief would be heavy at His death. But so would their joy at His return.

I felt God saying to me, "Eric, if you want life, do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid. Because I live, you also will live."

Sometimes people go away. But sometimes they come back again, and sometimes God sends someone else in return.

"Trust in God," Jesus said, "trust also in Me."

I found a penny the night before I read this, a small reminder that I could trust in God.

"In God we trust," it said to me.

"In God I trust," I prayed in reply.

"I am the way and the truth and the life."

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 15 (NKJV): Apart from Me You Can Do Nothing

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do

whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear

witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

My Thoughts

I'd like my life to bear much fruit. And Jesus tells me how: "Remain in Me and you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing."

As I wrote those words on paper, I happened to separate the word "nothing."

"Apart from Me you can do no thing."

No thing. Not one thing. Nothing that will last anyway; nothing that will bear much fruit. And I want to bear much fruit.

"Keep My words in you," I felt Jesus saying, "then you will ask rightly because you'll be using My words when you ask, and you'll get what you ask for."

Why does Jesus want us to ask? He tells us: "So that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

"Eric, do you want complete joy? Remain in Me. Allow, welcome, and *enjoy* My pruning so your joy may be complete, and you will will bear much fruit."

Thank You, Lord!

"Apart from Me you can do nothing."

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 16 (NIV): He Will Guide You into All Truth

“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the

Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."

At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

"Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will

ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God."

"Do you now believe?" Jesus replied. "A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

My Thoughts

I was praying for the truth. I had a dear friendship that was struggling, in part because I wanted it to be so much more than a friendship.

I wondered, "Have I harmed our friendship by pressing in and need to step back? Or to be a true friend, do I need to press in more? Should I drop it forever or keep going one day at a time? What's the truth?"

I was thinking about all of this while attending a meeting. I had to walk out, go into the bathroom, and cry.

As I walked out of the bathroom, I saw another friend I had been wanting to talk to about something else very important. God had recently been speaking to me about getting in touch with him. I had never seen him before in this building, but there he was.

It was so unexpected, but so divinely appointed. I couldn't help but realize that God was walking right beside me and lining things up for me, even in my grief.

The funny thing is, this man was standing inside an information booth, the place you go to get guidance, with the word "INFORMATION" above him in all caps.

"I will guide you into all truth," Jesus said.

I felt God's guiding me. "Keep going forward," I felt Him saying, "one day at a time, one step at a time, as I reveal it to you. Can you trust Me today?" God said.

"YES," I replied, in all caps. :)

*"But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes,
He will guide you into all truth."*

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 17 (NLT): Now This is Eternal Life

After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life —to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.

“I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.

“My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold.

“Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

“O righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.”

My Thoughts

Jesus prayed that we would have eternal life. Then He defined it: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent."

Knowing God and knowing His Son *is* eternal life.

Jesus prayed many other things for us as well. He prayed we would complete the work God gave us to do, that we would have the full measure of joy, and that we would be protected from the evil one.

Why would I say that Jesus prayed these things for us when He was praying them for His disciples? Because He added, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message..."

I am one who has believed in Him through their message! Perhaps you are, too. That means Jesus prayed these things for you, too!

As I read these words, I said, "Lord, I do know You. Thank You. And I want to know You more."

I thought of some projects I was working on at the time: renovating my attic, finishing my musical, tuning my piano, and cleaning my house for some filming. I felt God wanted me to complete them. They were all part of the work God gave me to do that Jesus prayed I would complete.

"Lord, I want to complete the work You've given me to do," I said. Knowing this gave me joy.

If you know God and know His Son Jesus Christ, your eternal life has already begun!

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 18 (AMP): My Kingdom is Not of this World

Having said these things, Jesus left with His disciples and went across the ravine of the Kidron. There was a garden there, which He and His disciples entered. Now Judas, who was betraying Him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with His disciples. So Judas, having obtained the Roman cohort and some officers from the high priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was about to happen to Him, went to them and asked, "Whom do you want?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus said, "I am He." And Judas, who was betraying Him, was also standing with them. When Jesus said, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again He asked them, "Whom do you want?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you want Me, let these men go on their way." This was to fulfill and verify the words He had spoken, "Of those whom You have given Me, I have not lost even one." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword in its sheath! Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"

So the cohort and their commander and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him, and led Him to Annas first; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who

was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, so he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the [residence of the] high priest; but Peter was standing outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter inside. Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and the officers had made a fire of coals, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. And Peter was with them, standing and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in a synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews habitually congregate; and I said nothing in secret. Why question Me? Question those who have heard what I said to them. They know what I said." But when He said this, one of the officers who was standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that how You answer the high priest?" Jesus replied, "If I have said anything wrong, make a formal statement about the wrong; but if properly, why did you strike Me?" So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not one of His disciples, are

you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you with Him in the garden?" So Peter denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium (governor's palace). Now it was early and the Jews did not enter the Praetorium so that they would not be unclean, but might eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" They answered, "If He were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you." Then Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him according to your own law." The Jews said, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." This was to fulfill the word which Jesus had spoken to indicate by what manner of death He was going to die.

So Pilate went into the Praetorium again, and called Jesus and asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own people and their chief priests have handed You over to me. What have You done?" Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting to keep Me from being handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this world." So Pilate said to Him, "Then You are a King?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a King. This is why I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the

truth hears and listens carefully to My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”

And when he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no guilt in Him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. So shall I release for you the King of the Jews?” Then they all shouted back again, “Not this Man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

My Thoughts

Sometimes we forget this world is not our final destination, which leads to our distress. “My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus said, “...but from another place.”

When the soldiers and Jewish officials came looking for someone, Jesus said knew who they wanted. They wanted Him. And He knew what was going to happen. They wanted to kill Him. He knew this was His time.

Peter, however, didn’t know that. He didn’t know what was going to happen, even though Jesus had tried to warn Him. Peter thought Jesus was getting ready to take over the kingdom here, and he was willing to fight for Jesus. Then Jesus surrendered and told Peter to put away his sword.

It must have totally deflated Peter. The One for whom he was willing to die was giving up. How could he not lose hope?

Then Jesus addressed the issue: His kingdom was not of this world or His followers would have fought for Him,

and He would have allowed them to. His kingdom was from another place, an eternal place.

I've heard it said, "We are not human beings having a temporary spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings have a temporary human experience."

"Who is it you want?" Jesus asked.

I want Him. I want Jesus. The One who walked this earth, and who walks now in heaven, too. For I, too, walk this earth, and will some day walk in heaven, too.

Jesus really is all you need, for through Him you get everything else you need... both in this world and in the world to come.

*"My kingdom is not of this world...
but from another place."*

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 19 (MSG): It is Finished

So Pilate took Jesus and had him whipped. The soldiers, having braided a crown from thorns, set it on his head, threw a purple robe over him, and approached him with, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then they greeted him with slaps in the face.

Pilate went back out again and said to them, “I present him to you, but I want you to know that I do not find him guilty of any crime.” Just then Jesus came out wearing the thorn crown and purple robe.

Pilate announced, “Here he is: the Man.”

When the high priests and police saw him, they shouted in a frenzy, “Crucify! Crucify!”

Pilate told them, “You take him. You crucify him. I find nothing wrong with him.”

The Jews answered, “We have a law, and by that law he must die because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

When Pilate heard this, he became even more scared. He went back into the palace and said to Jesus, “Where did you come from?”

Jesus gave no answer.

Pilate said, “You won’t talk? Don’t you know that I have the authority to pardon you, and the authority to—crucify you?”

Jesus said, “You haven’t a shred of authority over me except what has been given you from heaven. That’s why

the one who betrayed me to you has committed a far greater fault.”

At this, Pilate tried his best to pardon him, but the Jews shouted him down: “If you pardon this man, you’re no friend of Caesar’s. Anyone setting himself up as ‘king’ defies Caesar.”

When Pilate heard those words, he led Jesus outside. He sat down at the judgment seat in the area designated Stone Court (in Hebrew, Gabbatha). It was the preparation day for Passover. The hour was noon. Pilate said to the Jews, “Here is your king.”

They shouted back, “Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!”

Pilate said, “I am to crucify your king?”

The high priests answered, “We have no king except Caesar.”

Pilate caved in to their demand. He turned him over to be crucified.

They took Jesus away. Carrying his cross, Jesus went out to the place called Skull Hill (the name in Hebrew is Golgotha), where they crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side, Jesus in the middle. Pilate wrote a sign and had it placed on the cross. It read:

Jesus the Nazarene

the King of the Jews.

Many of the Jews read the sign because the place where Jesus was crucified was right next to the city. It was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The Jewish high priests objected. “Don’t write,” they said to Pilate, “The

King of the Jews.' Make it, 'This man said, "I am the King of the Jews.''''

Pilate said, "What I've written, I've written."

When they crucified him, the Roman soldiers took his clothes and divided them up four ways, to each soldier a fourth. But his robe was seamless, a single piece of weaving, so they said to each other, "Let's not tear it up. Let's throw dice to see who gets it." This confirmed the Scripture that said, "They divided up my clothes among them and threw dice for my coat." (The soldiers validated the Scriptures!)

While the soldiers were looking after themselves, Jesus' mother, his aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her. He said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother.

Jesus, seeing that everything had been completed so that the Scripture record might also be complete, then said, "I'm thirsty."

A jug of sour wine was standing by. Someone put a sponge soaked with the wine on a javelin and lifted it to his mouth. After he took the wine, Jesus said, "It's done...complete." Bowing his head, he offered up his spirit.

Then the Jews, since it was the day of Sabbath preparation, and so the bodies wouldn't stay on the crosses over the Sabbath (it was a high holy day that year), peti-

tioned Pilate that their legs be broken to speed death, and the bodies taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man crucified with Jesus, and then the other. When they got to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. One of the soldiers stabbed him in the side with his spear. Blood and water gushed out.

The eyewitness to these things has presented an accurate report. He saw it himself and is telling the truth so that you, also, will believe.

These things that happened confirmed the Scripture, "Not a bone in his body was broken," and the other Scripture that reads, "They will stare at the one they pierced."

After all this, Joseph of Arimathea (he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he was intimidated by the Jews) petitioned Pilate to take the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission. So Joseph came and took the body.

Nicodemus, who had first come to Jesus at night, came now in broad daylight carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. They took Jesus' body and, following the Jewish burial custom, wrapped it in linen with the spices. There was a garden near the place he was crucified, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been placed. So, because it was Sabbath preparation for the Jews and the tomb was convenient, they placed Jesus in it.

My Thoughts

They struck Jesus in the face. It's perhaps the most brutal way to confront someone.

And it's a way I once wanted to confront someone. But Jesus already took that punch for them.

Yet I still wanted to throw a punch, and not just one, but as many as I could for what had been done.

As Forrest Gump said while watching Jenny run out of rocks she was throwing at the house of her abuser: "Sometimes I guess there just aren't enough rocks."

Sometimes there just aren't enough rocks, and we know we just need to forgive, for Jesus has already taken the beating. Still, I was afraid what I might do if I met this person on the street.

Through a friend, I sent a message to let this man know of my anger and frustration. I was trying to forgive, but I still wanted to throw some rocks. He sent back an apology the very next day. After five years of heaviness, I was able to have peace in my heart, not having to hold onto the competing emotions of wanting to pummel him but also forgive him.

"Thank You, Lord," I said.

I had found Life again with a capital "L." And it came from Forgiveness with a capital "F."

"It is finished."

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 20 (NKJV): By Believing You May Have Life in His Name

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.”

Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, “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.”

Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).

Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Re-

ceive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

My Thoughts

When Mary got to the tomb, two angels greeted her and said, “Why are you crying.” And if it wasn’t amazing enough to have two angels talking to her, when she turned around, Jesus was there, too!

She didn’t know it at the time. But it was Him.

Jesus asked her the same thing, “Why are you crying?” then added, “Who is it you’re looking for?”

I’m looking for You, Jesus! It makes me laugh. Maybe it shouldn’t. But it does. He was literally *right there!*

Then He says, “Mary.”

And with that... when Jesus said her name... she recognized Him.

Sometimes we miss what’s right in front of us, even the thing for which we’re desperately looking. Some mirrors on cars say, “Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.” I think that’s often the case with Jesus.

John, the friend of Jesus who wrote these stories, said He wrote them for one reason alone: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

In his way, I think John was trying to tell us that Jesus is closer than He appears. He is, in fact, very near. And if we’ll look for Him, and listen for Him, we’ll find Him.

These stories are testimonies to the reality and presence of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. If we believe that, we’ll have life in His name. Life with a capital “L”!

“...by believing you may have life in His name.”

Your Thoughts?

Chapter 21 (NIV): Follow Me

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153,

but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

My Thoughts

All the disciples hopes and dreams had died.

"I'm going out to fish," Peter said. What else could he do? His hands were tied.

Having caught nothing, Jesus appeared to them and called out, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

When I read that, I felt Jesus asking me the same question. I felt all my hopes and dreams had died, too.

"Eric, haven't you any fish?" I felt Him saying.

“No,” I said, just like the disciples.

“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some,” Jesus said to them.

But to me, since I wasn’t in a boat and had no net, I felt Jesus saying, “Eric, if you were to obey what I was calling *you* to do, what would it be?”

I thought about His words. I thought about some things He wanted me to do. But I wondered if I could do them.

“Eric, stay in the fight. Stay in the fight for your faith. It’s true and worth it. Remember who showed up at the Sea of Tiberius for you.”

I recalled a trip I took to Israel several years ago where I was staying at a hotel on the Sea of Tiberius, the same Sea the disciples were on, when God did a miracle for me.

I had felt God wanted me to invite a woman from Swaziland to come on the trip. She sent me a note wondering if God might ever make a way for her to come to the Holy Land. I told her I would pray for her, that I believed God would make a way. But then God spoke to me and told *me* to make a way for her!

No way! I thought. I barely had faith to get myself and Lana and four of my kids there with me, let alone getting someone there I had never met!

But the thought was “on me.” It wouldn’t leave me. It wouldn’t stop. We raised the money for her to come, including our own finances. We helped get her passport in order and got her a ticket to fly to Tel Aviv. But when she

arrived at the airport, she was turned away by the airport security because they questioned where and how she got a ticket. They put on a plane back home.

After all that effort, she called from a stopover in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to let us know she was headed home.

“No you’re not,” I said, not believing I was actually saying it! How could she possibly come *back* to Israel now? I remembered a friend who had a friend in Addis Ababa. He went to the airport, found her, and got her papers in order to return. She arrived the next day back in Tel Aviv, to the shock of the airport security.

“Why did you come back,” they asked. “Didn’t you know that once you’re deported, you’re not allowed to even try to come back in for five years?” No, she didn’t!

Israeli security called me. “Will you vouch for her and keep her with your group the entire time she’s here?”

“I will,” I said.

That night, she appeared at the hotel where we were staying on the Sea of Tiberius. It was no less miraculous to me than the appearance of Jesus must have been to His disciples.

“Eric,” God reminded me, “you found a way then. You made a way. You got her there. Don’t be discouraged in your current hopes and dreams. I can do this, too. I can make a way where there is no way.”

“Throw your net on the right side of the boat,” Jesus said.

They obeyed, and their net overflowed.

“Follow Me.”

Your Thoughts?

Conclusion: Jesus Did Many Other Things as Well

I started writing these notes while on a special trip to New York. It was the weekend of my wedding anniversary with Lana, but Lana wasn't with me. She had passed away five years earlier.

But every year since then, I've taken a trip somewhere on our anniversary. It seems wrong to stay home and go through an ordinary day when there's nothing ordinary about it.

I went to New York to see some shows that I wanted to see. It was a trip Lana and I had taken for our last anniversary together. It seemed fitting to do it again.

To be honest, I was hurting in a new and fresh way on this trip. To my surprise, I had fallen in love again since her passing. Twice, in fact. Both times, however, the women chose to be with someone else, not me. Both times, I was heartbroken... again.

The hotel where I was staying was just a few blocks from Broadway. It was called the RoomMate hotel, but I had no roommate.

The pain that weekend was fresh. Raw. Real.

I sat in the second row of a show that was one of the most tragically dramatic I had ever seen. Although there were many moments of laughter, the lead actor cried real tears through much of the show. At one point, he knelt down at the front of the stage and looked right at me with tears in his eyes, just as I had in mine.

I was in the second row and wanted to reach out and touch the tips of his shoes and tell him it was going to be okay. The flow of tears was cathartic.

After the show, I smiled as I caught snowflakes on my tongue in Times Square. I had kissed Lana there five years before.

I smiled as I toured Radio City Music Hall, especially when a photographer asked me to pose with a Rockette who was at least six inches taller than me. I could only shake my head and laugh.

I smiled as I got a text from my most recent love interest wanting to know how my trip was going, even though my heart was breaking because she still wanted to be “friends.”

Smiles and tears. Sometimes they go together. Grief is the price of love.

How could I possibly live life with a capital “L” when so much around me had fallen apart? That’s what I wanted to know from God that weekend. And that’s why I started writing the thoughts that appear in this book... on stationery from the RoomMate Hotel! I had the Gospel of John with me, in which Jesus promised to give me life to the full, even in the face of adversity.

If anyone knew how to find Life in the face of adversity, it was Jesus. And it was His friend, John, who wrote these stories so we could find life in His name.

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name,” John said.

And that's the same reason I've written my thoughts for you.

"Jesus did many other things as well," John said. "If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

I'm fully convinced this is true.

What about you? Maybe you have some stories to tell? I'm sure you do.

Why not write them down so the world can hear them? They *need* to hear them. I hope you'll share them.

"Jesus did many other things as well..."