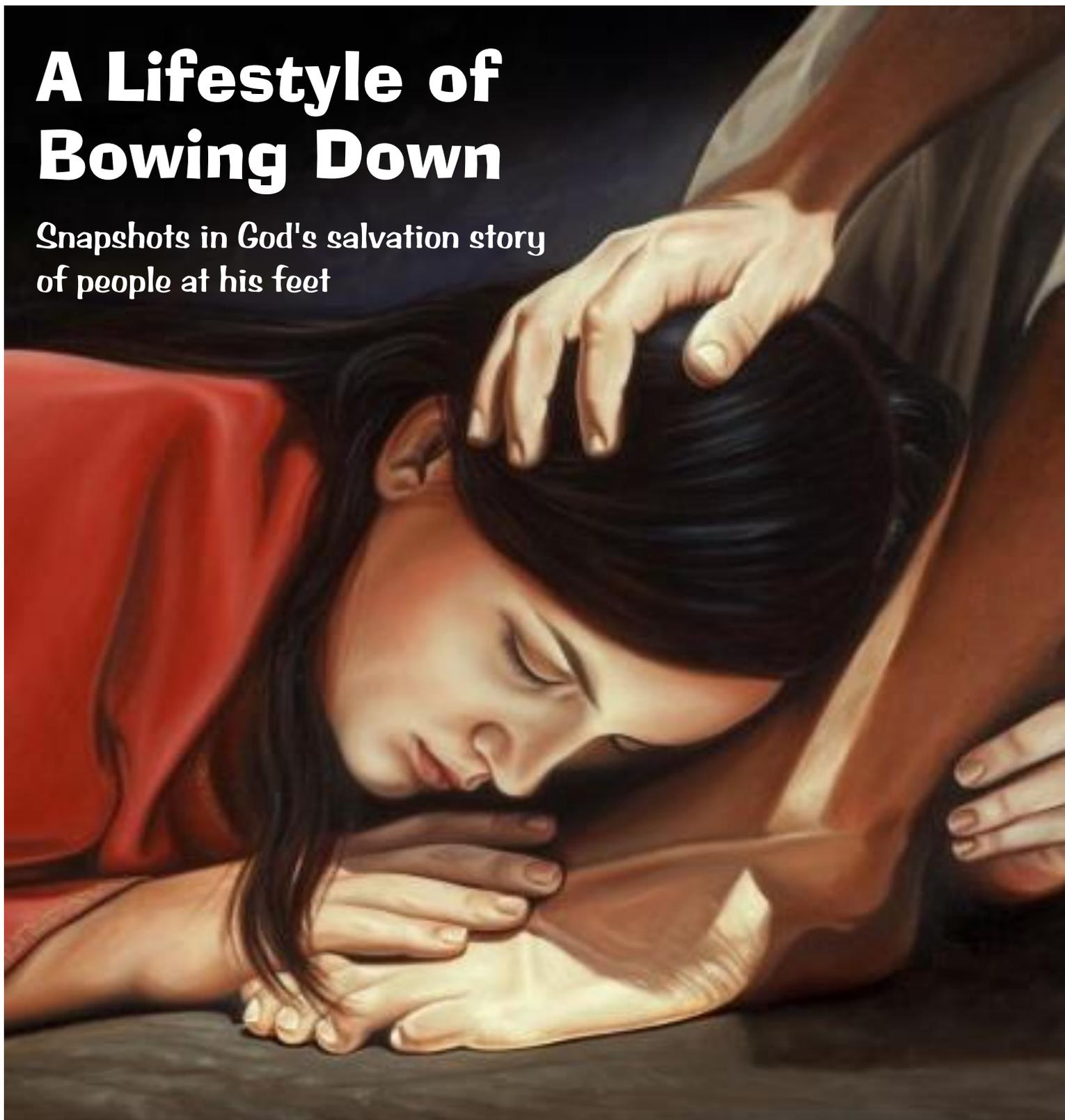


A Lifestyle of Bowing Down

Snapshots in God's salvation story
of people at his feet



A Bible Study for Women of All Ages

By Fiona Richardson

A Lifestyle of Bowing Down

A 12-SESSION STUDY

(With an Additional Portion for Review)

By Fiona Richardson

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A Lifestyle of Bowing Down

INTRODUCTION

In this series of Bible encounters we are going to look together at images, photographs in God's salvation story from Genesis through to Revelation. As we go along we will look personally and practically at what it means to live a lifestyle of bowing down. We will also see the great love story of God's patient and painful determination to save us and bring us to his feet, to that place of closeness near to his throne, despite every spiritual power and all human dullness, brokenness and passions that keep us away.

So often I think we live so unaware or desensitized to the incredible privilege that Jesus has won for us of a life with God. We often aim to get by and survive, expecting so little from the God who wants us with him so much, that he was willing to give his own life in exchange for ours on the cross. Often we would rather spend time connecting with someone we know on Facebook than make space to be with the mighty God who longs to be our friend and give himself to us. Often we are too proud to bow down and welcome him to be King in our hearts. Maybe we are too fearful, thinking his ways will not be good for us, he cannot accept us or does not delight to draw us into his loving embrace. Both of these: pride and fear, are strategies from Satan our enemy that keep us at a distance from God, out of the life-giving presence of Jesus.

I came to write this book out of a longing to get to the heart of our relationship with God. I was so inspired by the pictures scripture paints of awe, surrender, forgiveness, transformation, healing, peace and love before a great and beautiful God, that I began to feel challenged and hungry to look deeper at these moments at his feet. What if bowing down is not just a one off event that happens when someone has a special vision or visitation from God? What if it could be the attitude of my heart day by day and hour by hour? What if spending time at his feet is the most precious and life-giving thing I could ever do with my time? What if I can be transformed so that I can live aware of his presence every minute of every day and continue in that passionate longing for me to become less and him to become more, for me to bow down and for him to be lifted up? What if the glory and the peace of sitting at his feet and looking to him instead of at myself or my circumstances, could spill over into all of my moments, all of my thoughts, words and actions? What if, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our hearts can be transformed to become a place where Jesus is enthroned as King permanently and we do not try to grasp at control or to take back the crown ourselves?

In that attitude of bowing down and looking to him, what if the music of my heart, becomes a song of Jesus' mercy and passionate commitment to me and his love for everyone I meet? What if the soundtrack to my life becomes a love song of praise that lifts him higher in all my choices, circumstances, feelings, struggles, words and actions? So often my heart song is more about me and my family, what makes me happy or sad, what I want or about what I think I can or cannot do. What if my eyes were more on him and what he can do, than on me and my ability to provide what I need, succeed or care for others? I can ultimately bring all those needs to the Father knowing he cares for me and my family but He can lift me higher than that place of survival or living for self to truly live for him. What if the homes, the schools, the work places and the streets where we live become extensions of his throne room, where we seek his loving face and invite him to reign by our love, by laying down our desires and carrying the people and situations around us to his throne? What if we allowed the red carpet of his royalty to be rolled out into every corner of our lives so that we are constantly aware that we are children of the King, loved by a mighty God who reigns, serving one who is higher than any other power

or authority in our world? I believe that this is exactly what Jesus longs to do in our lives by his Holy Spirit with us and in us and it will lead to radical transformation in us and through us to others, if we will welcome him.

What do you think of when you picture someone bowing down? Maybe you think of it just as a physical action that does not involve the heart, maybe a cultural or religious requirement, a tradition to show respect or habit. When the Word of God talks about bowing down that is not what it means. Our culture trains us into looking after ourselves, fulfilling our personal desires, asserting our rights, pushing our own identity, and fighting for ourselves and our families. The opposite of that is not saying, "I don't matter," being passive or hating myself. Bowing down is not the same as putting myself down. Bowing down is not saying, "I am unlovable or I am worthless." These are lies of the enemy that Satan uses to oppress us and keep us away from God's love. Instead, we are saying, "I will bow to the one who loves me because I am valuable and precious in his sight."

Psalm 91 verse 4 gives us a picture of God's tender love and protection as we shelter and rest at his feet: *He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.*

I can come knowing loving Father sees me and my needs. Jesus died for me, his grace, and mercy, are for me; his blood cleanses me. He made me and he cares for me like a good shepherd so his glorious, loving presence is where I long to live. I can rest with him.

Psalm 95:6-7 puts it like this: *Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

Bowing down is about coming to God in awe and passionately adoring him in extravagant worship. It means showing him our love and receiving his love for us. Bowing down involves laying down self in loving surrender and saying, "You are God and I am not, you are King, take the throne. You are big and I am small, you are God of eternity, who was and is and is to come, I am your little child. You know all things, Lord of all wisdom; you know better than me." We often find those things very hard to do. But that place at his feet is a place of worship, forgiveness and cleansing, freedom, healing, rest and hearing his voice, the truth.

The foot of his throne is a place of seeing the world from the perspective of his reign over all people and all powers. From his feet we see all of history—all that is going on in our world through the lenses of who God is, what Jesus has done in the cross and resurrection and his rule over all eternity. We struggle to see his hand in our world or in our lives until we have bowed at his feet. It is a place where we can see people through God's heart instead of just our own eyes. It is a place of hearing the truth of what he says about you and hearing his leading. It's a place where we know for certain Jesus is with us and for us; an unshakable place of knowing we are his and he is ours. Until we get close to his feet and bow down in our hearts, we miss all of that. But even if we intend to live at his feet, we all know how complicated it gets, as we see clearly in this gospel account:

Luke 10:38 *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

Mary is the host and would be expected in that culture to prepare a good meal. Guests had come and they had to eat. We all have things that we feel are important, obligations and necessities, things we need to do for ourselves and our families. Yet Mary chooses to make time to sit at the feet of Jesus, time to listen to him. Martha is really stressed out and distracted, trying to do the right thing for Jesus and all the guests. She can't believe Mary is not helping, so Martha goes to Jesus to get him to tell her sister to come. Jesus calls her by name and tells her one thing is needed, sitting at his feet is the best and most important thing. He did not say there is nothing to do and he did not say do your tasks first and then when it is all finished and you don't feel tired or stressed about it anymore, you will have time to sit with me. No, Jesus said this is the most important thing and coming to my feet will involve a deliberate choice. It will require us to decide, "Whatever my family or culture says I need or have to do, this is the most important, the one thing I need and I choose to do what is best."

We so often fear that we will miss out on other good or necessary things if we make time for Jesus but there is a promise here. Jesus says the blessing of sitting at his feet "*will not be taken away*" (verse 42). He promises our time or our sacrifices of other things will never be wasted. Whatever has been laid aside will be outweighed by the life giving, transforming moments of being still with him. Whether it's five minutes snatched in the bathroom, the prayer-walk, the car journey or the quiet space at home, whenever we set aside time expectantly and listen to scripture, Jesus is waiting to meet us. However much our present parenting, house and garden, work, study, exercise, relationships, entertainment and social networks, events, meetings or family responsibilities demand our time, they will not sustain us or lead us into eternal life. We cannot so easily allow them to take the place of "what is best"—knowing Jesus and getting still and close enough to hear his eternal voice. Being busy, even if we are doing things for others or for Jesus as Martha did, must not rob us of time to be spent in that most precious place at his feet, where we know we need to meet him and hear his Word.

Sitting at his feet is not saying we have nothing else to do or no other place to be. Listening to Jesus is not saying, "I don't know what to think, I don't have anything else to listen to." Coming to his feet to hear him is saying "You have made me and all my thoughts I give to you. Your voice is the one I need to hear. Let me hear your loving voice. Come with your voice of power, majesty, of creativity, life, beauty. Speak to me, speak truth over me and into me. Let me hear your eternal voice of love and healing and light over every other voice that competes for my attention, over every distraction. Speak and silence any darkness I am listening to. I want to listen to your voice, over the voice of self; my reactions what I see and what I want. I want to see what lasts forever and not just look at this world, what is temporary. I want to know you and what really matters to you, what you want to do."

As we look at the pictures in salvation history of people at the feet of God, I pray that you will become hungry to be there, to make it your urgent priority. I hope you know you are welcomed by the King to spend time with him at his throne, and see his greatness and power. I hope you will come to receive his love and allow him to transform your heart there, so that you invite him to be King in every attitude, relationship and circumstance, and desire to live your whole life bowing down in his presence. I pray you will want to go to carry others to him in prayer and listen to what he wants to do in our lives and our world. If we really do that, he will live in us and through us by his Holy Spirit so that we are radically changed and he will bring his Kingdom in for our families, churches and communities. Imagine how it could be if we truly lived a lifestyle of bowing down?

SESSION 1: AT HIS FEET JUST AS WE ARE

The history of God's saving love for us begins with the truth of Genesis chapters 1 -3. We were made to know God and live at his feet. We were not created equals with God but he breathed his own breath of life into us and put his image in us. He lovingly made us to trust him, walk with him and not live independent from him. God's presence in the garden was a place of rest and abundance, having everything we needed and a place of everlasting life. But the enemy tempted us to think that allowing God to be King and live at his feet is not good, that somehow God is oppressing us if we listen to him and do not decide for ourselves what is good and evil. So we stopped trusting God, did what looked good to us and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We wanted to be our own boss. The consequences took us out of God's eternal presence so suffering and death entered the world. God's salvation story that runs throughout scripture is about how God made a way for us to come back to his loving presence, a way for us to be able to live eternally at his feet again. We watch him lead us home to bow down and allow him to rule in our hearts and lives once more.

As people chose what was good or evil and took the throne that was meant to for God, they lived for themselves. Greed, anger, jealousy, fear and violence ruled as people did as they pleased. Others seeking spiritual satisfaction made small gods who they could control and Satan continued the lie that to live under the rule of our loving creator is somehow oppressive. The enemy convinced us that we should think for ourselves and do what we feel, even worship anything we want. Whenever we swallow this lie we are not only ruled by self but we end up ultimately bowing down to evil, gripped by his controlling hands. As we look at our world today, we see this at work. People worship all kinds of extraordinary idols, put their trust in supernatural forces and others believe there is nothing more than what they see, but the darkness of selfish desires and evil spiritual powers fills our world with painful, distorted, or abusive relationships; personally, between communities, religions, ethnic groups and nations. Destructive behavior, oppression, addictions and violence continue to bind us and yet we still believe the original lie that a God who leads us and wants us to let him be the King of our lives is not good for us. We still struggle to trust his heart of love for us.

God's heart was broken as he looked on the chaos of this kind of world. He sent a flood to wash the evil from the earth he had made (Genesis 6-9). Then the next part of his saving plan was to bring forth a nation, a people who would know him and live in his ways of goodness. He chose Abraham and met with him personally, continually leading him (Genesis 12 to 24). Despite the messes Abraham made and the times he struggled to listen and wait, God kept his covenant. It was a love binding promise to make him the father of many descendants and give them a land to become a great nation set apart for him (Genesis 12 and 15). After years of waiting, Isaac was born and this very ordinary family was at the center of God's faithful purposes. Isaac had two sons and when he was blind and dying Jacob, the younger son and his mom schemed together to trick Esau out of his birth rite, a special blessing (Genesis 25). Selfishness, jealousy, anger and hatred filled this broken family and Jacob had to run away from his brother, who wanted rightful revenge. This is not the kind of person you would expect to receive an amazing visit from God; and yet our God of grace, who is bigger than our mess, brings Jacob to his feet. As you read, ask him to show you his relentless love that reaches those in broken relationships, those who have let their own desires rule them, those who are not bowing down to him—people like us.

Read Genesis 28 verses 10 to 22.

1. As Jacob runs from his angry brother and his heartbroken father, knowing he has cheated them both, he just wants to rest. Look at verse 12 again. What does God show him in his dream? How does this vision of what is really there and God's intervention in our world touch you today?
2. Read verse 13. Where we might have expected God to show Jacob what he did wrong or challenge him, what are the words of promise and hope God speaks to him?
3. In what ways do we often hold back or fear being at God's feet or listening to him because we do not expect his words to be forgiving or loving or we think he will not want to be with people like us?
4. God promises to fulfil his plans for blessing and include Jacob in them. Read verse 15. How else does he offer his grace and love personally in verse 15?
5. Read verse 16 and 17. What is Jacob's reaction when he wakes up?
6. How do you see in verses 16 and 17 the truth that in his grace, God longs to meet us personally, even if we are not ready for him and longs to lead us into humble awe of his greatness?
7. Look at verse 18 and verse 22. How do you see a change of attitude and perspective in Jacob's heart from his worshipful actions in these verses?
8. The personal encounter with a God who blesses and promises seems to have brought Jacob into new relationship with God. How has this passage shown you how life changing and good it is to come to the feet of the God of grace, who knows you and loves you just as you are?

SESSION 2: HEARING HIS WORDS OF LIFE

As we have seen, God is the one who invites us to his feet. He is willing to meet us, like Jacob, in our mess and shame. The Lord of all beauty and order is able to draw us near in our ugly chaos. God, the source of love and wholeness is longing to surround us in the midst of broken relationships. Jacob could not have showed less of an attitude of bowing down as he lied intently to his Father, cheated his brother and schemed to get God's blessing. And yet God bothers to meet with people like him and people like us. He gives a picture of a stairway to heaven showing the reality of his constant involvement in our world and he speaks the words of loving covenant again. He promises to be with Jacob and make him an important part of his own people. It is a picture of pure grace at his feet. When Satan comes at us with those unnoticed lies that say God only meets with better people than us or that if we get near him he will point out all our faults and crush us with condemnation, we need to remember Jacob. The time at the Lord's feet, even though Jacob is asleep, turns his heart to worship and to expect God's faithful presence and promises. The God of Jacob wants to do the same in our hearts.

Years later, the people of Israel have been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Who does God bring to his feet to be part of the plan to lead his people out? He chooses Moses, who is on the run from Egypt because he angrily murdered an Egyptian slave master. When the Lord introduces himself to this unlikely leader at the burning bush he tells him, "*I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*" (**Exodus 3:6**). He is not embarrassed to be known as "*the God of Jacob,*" and asks Moses to tell the Israelites that is who he is. As the Lord unfolds his plan and makes it clear that it is he who will save, by his power and his love for his own people, Moses is terrified and does not want to go. God carefully explains more details, gives him miracles to do, tells him what to say and promises to be with him and offers his brother to assist him and Moses goes to Egypt.

Sometimes I think we are afraid, like Moses, that if we really allow Jesus to be King of our hearts and bow down with all that we are, he will ask us to do uncomfortable things, go to places or people we don't like. We worry he will make us change things we can't change and he will ask us to do the impossible for him. When we believe that we hold back, we do not surrender all and we try to hold onto control of our lives. But at God's feet, Moses did not just hear a task to do or a change to make. He heard God's heart of compassion and relentless commitment to his people and he heard of God's authority that was so much higher than Pharaoh. He heard God's plan and he heard that it was only Yahweh's own power that could set his people free to worship him in their own land. He saw the miraculous signs God provided to equip him and he heard details of how God would work in other people and send his brother to help him. He was honest with God and told him his fears and weaknesses and God patiently answered.

Yes, it might still be tough and uncomfortable but when we come to his feet we see people and circumstances through the lenses of his love and authority and we begin to trust that Jesus is the one who will act and he will show us how and where and who and he will fill us with his Holy Spirit and go with us. When we do not get close enough to listen, we miss his power and desire to do the work; his love and intimate understanding of who we are and our circumstances and weaknesses. When we keep our distance and do not lay all of ourselves at his feet, God's purposes and his desires for us will always look scary because we focus on "me" and we do not allow him to give us himself.

In **Exodus 4**, when Moses shared God's heart with the people of Israel, **verse 31** says, *"When they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped."* They were overwhelmed with the truth that God knew them and saw their struggle and when we really know that it leads to trust and thankfulness at his feet. Yahweh, their personal God works out every detail of his saving plan exactly as he originally shared with Moses. When his people are free, out of Egypt at the mountain, just as he promised, they get to see his presence and hear his voice in an amazing new way. Look carefully at how Yahweh reveals himself at the mountain and the words of life he speaks there.

Read Exodus Chapter 19 verses 1-9 and verses 16-19.

1. Read verse 4 again. How does God describe his mighty, loving actions to save the people out of slavery in verse 4? What pictures does he use and where does he say he has brought them to? How do his words touch you?
2. Look at verses 5 and 6. What other words of Covenant binding commitment and promise does Yahweh ask Moses to share with his precious people? How does he tell them their worth to him?
3. God gives himself to the people and speaks his love over them here before he gives the commandments. He shows them this is about a relationship with him, not rules. Why do you think it is important for us to hear how God has loved us and who he has saved us to be for him before we can listen to how he wants us to respond to him?
4. Read verse 8 again. How do the people respond in this verse to all God's tender covenant words for them?
5. In verses 16 to 19, Yahweh, comes down on the mountain and allows them to see something of his glory and power. What do these verses say about what they saw and heard?

SESSION 3: AT HIS FEET IN DESPERATE NEED

So, at the mountain we see the glory and power of God and hear his covenant words of love-binding, two-way relationship. In that awesome place of his presence, God speaks words of life and shows his people what it means to be set apart as his own. Yahweh gives an amazing amount of detail (Exodus 21-23) that shows us he wants to lead us in every aspect of life—worship, work, relationships and community. His feet are the place we can receive his Word as we read who he is, who we are to him and how he wants us to live in his truth and goodness. He does not want a people who will just “keep the rules,” or, “stop doing bad things.” Our God, Yahweh, wants a people today, as then, who will make him the first in our hearts and never give our hearts away to another power, idea, treasure or passion. Jesus teaches about keeping these commands and desiring to please God with our hearts, being transformed in our thoughts, not just modifying our behavior (Matthew 5:21-22 and 27-28). Like an exclusive marriage, the relationship does not work if we bow down to, or allow ourselves to be controlled by anyone or anything else. In other places God puts it like this, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*” (**Deuteronomy 6:5**). In the Ten Commandments, the Lord makes it clear that our worship must be for him alone and our hope must not be in anything else to save us, lead us or keep us. The consequences are serious. In fact bowing down to something else means that we cannot be his own, we cannot fully live in his goodness or live out his character of integrity, love, faithfulness, truth and peace, reflected in the rest of the commandments.

So after hearing this way of living out the covenant love relationship in a lifestyle of bowing down, what did God’s chosen, treasured and beloved people do? As Moses was receiving the full instructions for a place of worship and a way for God to give them his presence, they forgot his faithfulness and the vow they had made to be his people, set apart for him (Exodus 32). They were fed up of waiting. They took the gold that was meant for making God’s dwelling place and they made a copy of the gods of the nations around them, an easier truth, one they could control. They bowed down in worship and said “These are your gods... who brought you out of Egypt.” How could they? There is a dreadful cost. Moses falls at God’s feet on their behalf, pleading for mercy, praying he will not take his presence from them. We get to see what it might look like to go to God’s feet, recognizing our betrayal of his love and to cry out to him for forgiveness. In that place (Exodus 33), Moses gets to see something of his glory and compassion and God does not give up on his people.

Now as then, there are times when our unfaithfulness should lead us to his feet to cry out for forgiveness but instead our hearts are often dulled and like a loveless, disconnected marriage, we try to go through the motions of going to church and on the surface, “doing the right things.” God’s heart breaks, as this is not the relationship of passionate love, surrender and peace that he won for us through the costly sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It keeps us out of the place of his abundant goodness at his feet. The enemy loves to numb our hearts, lie and tell us it’s all about just “getting it right” or about a vague belief that God is somewhere out there. But Jesus has died and risen for you and the Holy Spirit has been poured out for you so that God can draw you deep into heart to heart love with him that captivates your desires and moves you to stay close in his embrace (Ezekiel 36).

Moses surely lived life at God's feet. As he stood in the gap for his people, praying for them, God met him and gave him special revelations of himself. He passed on everything Yahweh said for them and pleaded for people. In **Exodus 34:29** we get a beautiful picture of how we are changed as we come to God's feet: "*He [Moses] was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.*"

Despite the pattern of distraction, unfaithfulness and putting their hope in other gods and rituals, Yahweh does not give up on his people and through many trials he graciously brings them into the land he promised. After the successful reign of David comes King Solomon. The tent of worship that housed the ark of Yahweh's presence is exchanged for a permanent temple in Jerusalem and this is what happens when they invite God to make it his meeting place where they could come to his feet in praise, thanks and turn to him for forgiveness or help. **2 Chronicles 7:1** *When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. 2 The priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it. 3 When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."* Once again, these verses show us a picture of the best and only response when God gives us himself. He gave his people a place to bow down where he would meet them with his presence and a system of sacrifices to make their relationship right with him again by offering the life of an animal for their forgiveness.

A split into two kingdoms and several kings later, after many episodes of not staying in that attitude at his feet, we find the southern kingdom of Judah under the good leadership of Jehoshaphat. Look carefully at the dramatic images of what it looks like to lay down our desire to be in control and put our trust in the God who fights for us.

Read 2 Chronicles 20 verses 1 to 26.

1. Read verses 3 and 4 again. When the king hears the terrifying news that a vast army is on the way to attack them, what is his first response and what do the people do with him?
2. Look at verse 6. As the people are all together in the temple, what does Jehoshaphat pray. What does his prayer show that he believes about God?
3. Read verse 12. What does this prayer say and how can it be a good prayer for us to come humbly and throw ourselves at God's feet in every circumstance?

4. Read verse 13 again. Who is there? How does this picture of coming together to God's feet to pray and listen, touch you?

5. Look again at verses 15 and 17. In response to all the people listening for God together, what does he say to them through the Holy Spirit?

6. In what ways do we often try to fix things or fight for ourselves because we do not come to his feet with our needs or listen to him speak these same words to us? Where do you struggle to come to him in your needs and listen for these words of verses 15 and 17?

7. Read verse 18. As the king and the people hear God speaking and receive his promise to fight for them what do they do in response?

8. Look at verse 21. What is the careful arrangement and what do the people do as they go to the battlefield, trusting God's promise? How do the words of their praise strike you?

9. Read verses 22 and 23 again. What happens the moment they begin to praise? How does it show you a picture of worship, thanking the Lord for his love, as a powerful strategy against the enemy in the spiritual battles of our lives?

SESSION 4: CLEANSING AND CALLING AT THE THRONE

The amazing images of 2 Chronicles 20 hold so many truths of what it means to live at God's feet and how we often miss it. This was a nation in crisis but look at the use of time. King Jehoshaphat could have been planning strategies, gathering weapons or organizing massive troops of soldiers to defend his country against the fast approaching armies. Yet his first reaction is to call the people to fast and travel with their families to Jerusalem to pray together. When we say we don't have time to pray what we often mean is there are more urgent things we should do with our time. We don't really believe God can do anything in this situation or we don't expect he wants to speak to us. Instead we take all our time to try to control the situation ourselves in our own wisdom and strength. Or we ask everyone else what to do first, put our hope in people and plans then quickly ask God to bless what we think we should do. When we are struggling or anxious we often put time into trying to forget our situation and seek comfort with entertainment, alcohol, food, relationships or activities rather than taking time to bring our burdens to the real comforter. We get busy, looking to everything else and everyone else instead of looking into the face of the one who knows us and longs to meet us. Jehoshaphat not only prays, but takes time to gather with others because he knows there is a power in coming together to God's throne. They even take time to praise and remember that God is ruler and he has the authority. They proclaim that Yahweh holds the people in his hands, not the enemies and not Jehoshaphat as king. In praise we not only lift up God but we lay down our control and say that we trust God's heart, his authority and his wisdom for us. Jesus taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer lifting up God's name first; "hallowed be your name". Worshipping Jesus first in our prayers also means we declare him greater than any other spiritual power, person or circumstance and it transforms the way we pray.

In contrast to that kind of bowing down in our needs, we often wander around the edge of God's throne room, telling him what we think he should be doing and complaining he is not doing it. He can cope with our anger but he wants to do more than just listen. Although he wants us to come honestly, just talking at God does not invite him to rule and He longs for us to do what Jehoshaphat and the people did. They came humbly into his presence, lifted him up as King, then cried out and poured out their hearts and the situation before him. Even when we do that in our prayers, we often get up at that point and leave his feet to get on with managing the struggle ourselves. The prayer in **2 Chronicles 20:12** says, "*We are powerless, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*" It is hugely different from praying, "This is what you should do," or, "Give me strength so I can fix this." It is falling down at his feet and saying, "I can't," and "Only you can"; "Your ways are better than my ways; this situation needs you, not me." It is a prayer of putting our hope in God himself, looking to his face rather than looking at the circumstances or our feelings and looking for the answers and solutions.

In this picture, the people of God then wait in his presence to listen to him. By his Spirit he speaks his words of love, authority and direction to the people. How often do we stay in a pit of self-sufficiency, human plans, fear and worry because we do not stay at his feet to hear his words of life to us? Many times we will need to listen to his Word by reading the Bible for the Spirit to show us how mighty God is and how much he loves us and to hear his promises to be with us and fight for us. We often miss all of that because we don't read or don't ask the Spirit minister his presence and truth to our hearts. We don't welcome him to lift up our heads to focus on God himself and see him, instead of looking down at ourselves or our circumstances. Jesus invites us to let God be King in every feeling, place, relationship and every situation. He longs for us to ask him what he wants to do as we pray, "*Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (**Matthew 6:10**). Recognizing

God is mighty, he sees us, he knows what to do and will not leave us, leads us to bow down at his feet. We see the people praising, and then taking God at his Word and marching to the battle ground with worship songs of who God is and his love for them instead of human strategies to fight for themselves. Worship is a mighty war song of trust in Jesus' power, not our own. Our praise invites the Lord to fight for us and crushes the enemy.

Sadly, many of the kings of God's people did not live in this beautiful trust at God's feet. They grasped at power for themselves and led the people to bow down to many other idols. They copied the nations around them. Yahweh does not stop talking to his people, pleading with them to return. He sends prophets like Hosea and Amos to pour out the message of his heart at this time. In Hosea, God speaks of his covenant relationship with his people like a marriage and their turning to idols and the gods of other cultures, like marital unfaithfulness and prostitution. He pleads with them over and over to live in his love, warning them of the consequences of giving their hearts to another. **Amos 5:4-6** (NLT) says, *"Now this is what the Lord says to the family of Israel: 'Come back to me and live! Don't worship at the pagan altars at Bethel; don't go to the shrines at Gilgal or Beersheba. . . .' Come back to the Lord and live!"*

King Uzziah had known the Lord and had tried to lead his way King Uzziah had known the Lord and tried to lead his way (2 Chronicles 26:4-5). But in pride he tried to do what only a Priest could do in God's holy temple and refused to listen to warning. He suffered leprosy and could not enter the temple again (see 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). When the King died, the nation was in uproar and spiritual crisis again. Into this chaos the Lord spoke with Isaiah. Ask Jesus to open the eyes of your heart to see him as you look at this next vision from the foot of God's throne.

Read Isaiah 6:1-8.

1. Look at verse 1. What does Isaiah see? In the circumstances of national chaos, why do you think God showed Isaiah the real throne?
2. In what ways do we need the Lord to bring us to his throne; to lift our eyes to a bigger vision of him and his authority to rule in our world and in our lives?
3. In this vision the seraphim cover themselves in God's awesome presence. Look at verse 3 and 4. What is the song that Isaiah hears around the throne and how does verse 4 show the power of this truth?
4. Read verse 5. As Isaiah sees the vision of God, the reigning King, what does he see about himself and his people in verse 5?

SESSION 5: AT HIS FEET WHATEVER THE COST

In the vivid picture of Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6) we hear our need to see who the real King is and our need to receive God's mercy. We look to him with the help of the Holy Spirit when we read the word and when we worship with others. In those places he shows us himself and ministers his presence to us. Only at his feet do we see his greatness over our chaos and his authority over the circumstances that seem to be in control of our lives. As we see his glory and majesty we get to hear the worship of heaven, the songs of his holiness. In that place we become aware of our messed up attitudes and our hearts, words and actions that are so far from the purity of his heart. Through the cross of Jesus, we too can be touched by his fire that burns away the dirt in our hearts and refines our desires. The fire of his forgiveness also cleanses us from the sins done against us and heals our hearts. We can be forgiven and transformed by his Holy Spirit so that he dwells in us and we allow him to have the throne and reign again in our lives. With him as King and the Holy Spirit to direct us, it is possible to turn our hearts away from pleasing ourselves and turn towards him in every thought, feeling, word, action and circumstance. Only in that place of his grace and cleansing fire, only when we have allowed him to meet us and begin to transform us can we hear him calling us to be his messengers, to share his heart with the world.

For Isaiah, his willingness to go was a tough commitment. God was going to speak through him at a time when his people were not willing to listen. He was going to give Isaiah extraordinary messages about the Messiah, the Savior who would not come until 700 years later. Without this vision of God as the one really on the throne, without this experience of forgiveness and his transforming fire, how would Isaiah have been able to do anything for the Lord? How could he hear and express God's heart or carry the messages of warning, mercy and promises for the future?

We must never think we can hear or accept the call to be God's people in the challenging communities and circumstances he has put us, without bowing at his feet, receiving his forgiveness at the cross and allowing the Holy Spirit to refine our hearts and change our desires to reflect his. First we need constantly to see how great he is and his desire to do the work then listen to how he is asking us to be part of his plans. Otherwise we will try our own plans and will speak our own thoughts, not the messages from God's heart. We do things in our own strength and quickly become proud, or overburdened and discouraged, and we take it as personal rejection if our efforts have no power to impact anyone around us. In contrast, if we draw near enough to see him and hear his voice, we will be sent to join him in his passion for the communities we live in through our prayers, our relationships and the opportunities he gives us to speak truth into the hearts he has already prepared.

Yahweh, the Lord, was extremely patient with his people. He continued to send them messengers, prophets who spoke on his behalf. Jeremiah pours out God's broken heart for his people and warns them of the urgency to turn back and bow down only to him instead of the idols they have trusted. In **Jeremiah 3 verse 19-20** the Lord cries, *"How gladly would I treat you like my children and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation. I thought you would call me 'Father' and not turn away from following me. But like a woman unfaithful to her husband so you, Israel, have been unfaithful to me."*

His people are like children who have rejected their father or a wife who has turned to other men. The chosen people of God had broken their side of the love-binding covenant. Jeremiah warns them that the privilege of staying in God's land where they enjoy his blessings, provision and protection will be gone if they do not come back to his feet. The Lord says in **Jeremiah 7:5** *But I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; 6 only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans, and widows; only if you stop your murdering; and only if you stop harming yourselves by worshiping idols. 7 Then I will let you stay in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever. 8 "Don't be fooled into thinking that you will never suffer because the Temple is here. It's a lie! 9 Do you really think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, and burn incense to Baal and all those other new gods of yours, 10 and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, "We are safe!"—only to go right back to all those evils again?* (NLT) These uncomfortable words remind us that we cannot expect God's blessing, protection and provision in his presence if we stay away from him, ignore his ways and bow down to other things.

2 Chronicles 36 describes the horrific reality of what happened next: **15** *The Lord, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. 16 But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words... 17 So the Lord brought the king of Babylon against them... They had no pity on the people, killing both young men and young women, the old and the infirm. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. 18 The king took home to Babylon all the articles, large and small, used in the Temple of God... 19 Then his army burned the Temple of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value.* (NLT)

In this mess, Daniel and his friends were taken away into the king's court, given new Babylonian names, even taught the magic arts and pushed to the limits to forget who they were as God's own people. Ask the Lord to challenge your heart as we look at living in a place where no one else is bowing down to our God; a place where there are huge risks to staying at his feet.

Read Daniel 3 verses 8 to 28.

1. Look at verses 10 and 11. What were the people forced to do, and what was the consequence if they did not follow the king's orders?
2. Read verses 14 and 15 again. How does the king say Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo have defied him, and how can they save themselves?
3. Look at verses 17 and 18. What kind of relationship do the 3 friends have with God? How do you see their total trust and commitment in verse 18?
4. In what situations and what attitudes do we need to have that same passionate resolve to refuse to bow down to anything else?

5. Look at verses 22 and 23. Because the friends refused to worship other gods or obey the king, what did they face?

6. Look at verses 24 and 25. Although they were willing to risk destruction, how does God show his power over the king and his care for his people?

7. Read verse 27 to 28. How does the king's understanding in verse 28 strike you today and how does it show you the impact our determination to stay at God's feet, whatever the cost?

Read Daniel 9:17-23. Daniel has also been willing to refuse to bow down to other gods, whatever the cost. He has been faithfully praying, standing in the gap for God's people for years and God has given him amazing visions of his authority over all history and human leaders.

8. Look at verse 18, 19 and 20. What does Daniel pray here and how do you see his attitude of asking forgiveness in verse 18 and 19?

9. Read verses 22 and 23. The angel Gabriel comes to him as he is praying. What does he tell Daniel about the response to his prayers and how God sees him? How do these loving words touch you?

10. How do these verses show you God's heart for you and his attentive listening for your prayers? How does this picture encourage you and challenge you to stay at his feet in prayer?

SESSION 6: BOWING AT THE FEET OF A CHILD

Daniel and his friends refused to bow down to anything but the one true God. In a place where everyone around them was obeying the king or worshipping other gods, they took the risk of praying and worshipping the God who loved them and called them his own. Whether he kept them physically safe or not, they were determined to remain faithful to the real King of their hearts. It seemed like the culture, the place they were living and the human leaders could control their hearts and they should do everything to stay safe and comfortable.

All around the world people are in impossible situations where the leaders, religions or culture of their communities are forcing them to follow other truths or bow down to other gods. They can fit in and be accepted and safe, or they can refuse to compromise their allegiance to Jesus. Their decision is often costly, and they risk relationships, money, work, education, peace and freedom willing to face harassment, pain or death. Whatever the challenges we face to following Jesus in our communities; our first priority, for ourselves and our children, cannot be our personal safety, success and comfort. When those become our bottom line and the priority that drives us, we stop bowing down to the Lord. We allow ourselves to be dragged to the altars of self-preservation, ease, ambition, popularity, personal gain and ultimately other values and spiritual powers. We take our hearts from Jesus and live for self. We lose sight of the hope to be with God and rest in his presence for eternity, all for the sake of enjoyment, easy relationships and comfort today. We cannot stay at his feet and give our hearts to the one who has given his life for us if we are not willing to walk with him in risk and sacrifice.

Luke 9:23 [Jesus said] *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”*

Jesus did not promise that everything will be easy but told us to expect suffering if we bow to him alone. He did not expect us to fit in with the world and the world to treat us kindly when we choose him; but, like Daniel’s friends in the furnace, Jesus does promise to stay with us and never leave us.

John 16:33 *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.*

He sees all that you lay down for him and even promises blessing and eternal reward for those who suffer for his name.

Matthew 5:11 *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...*

Daniel stood in the gap and bowed down in prayer for his nation. God heard his humble prayers and answered with his grace and mercy. Yahweh allowed them to go back to their land and gave them a new start to live as his own people. Back in Jerusalem, God used a king who was not his own to pay for the rebuilding of the temple. But look what happens even before the people begin to build.

Ezra 3:3 *Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord...*

First, they build an altar with a heart to bow down. Their priority is not for the place or the building but to worship the one true God and give themselves totally to him. Their passion for God is stronger than their fear of the people around them or any desire to “fit in.” This is a vivid picture of the determination and love involved for us to live a lifestyle of bowing down. When they come together to hear God’s word again, we see their hearts have been softened and they are ready to live as God’s beloved people once more.

Nehemiah 8:3 And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law....**6** Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

This was a wonderful restoration but God had bigger plans to bring more of the world he had made back from the darkness of being apart from him, into his light and back into his love. He had told his people to expect more of his saving power and more of his mercy to be poured out, not just for them but for the nations of the world. Hundreds of years later, the message of hope God gave through Isaiah began to unfold.

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. . . **3** Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

It was time to get ready for God’s glory to step down into our world. When John the Baptist is born, his dad, Zechariah, is filled with the Holy Spirit and says his son will prepare the way for another.

Luke 1:77 To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, **78** because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven **79** to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

John’s gospel (John 1:1-3,9) tells us that Jesus himself, who had been there since before the world began, was God’s light coming into our world. When we walked in darkness and death, because we could not come to his feet and have life in his light, he came down to our feet. Who would have thought that the great God who created us to bow down under his kingship and care, would exchange his mighty feet of glory for the tiny, ordinary, vulnerable feet of a baby? The night that Jesus was born the angels proclaimed:

Luke 2:10 I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

The one that God’s people had waited for, the Messiah, the Savior in the line of King David was finally here, but in a way no one expected. Ask the Lord to show you just how far he came down and how small his feet became in order for him to walk in your footsteps. Watch for the extraordinary lengths God goes to, to bring anyone from anywhere to bow down to him.

Read Matthew 2 verses 1 to 12.

1. Look again at verse 1. Where does this verse tell you the wise men, royal astrologers who studied the stars, came from on the long, risky journey to Jerusalem?

2. Read verse 2 again. Who do these outsiders, not connected with God's people, recognize Jesus to be and what have they come to do?
3. Look at verses 4 and 5. Who did Herod get to tell him where the Christ, the Messiah, would be born and how did they know?
4. How do verses 4 and 5 contrasted with the Wise men's determination to worship, show you the difference between just knowing about Jesus or knowing the Bible and actually coming to worship him?
5. Read verses 9 and 10. What did God do to lead the men all the way to Jesus and what is their response to following his lead?
6. How does this picture show you God's heart and his power to bring anyone from any background to Jesus, Savior of the world? Who do you struggle to believe that for?
7. Look at the first half of verse 11. What do the wise men do first of all when they see Jesus? How does their humble reverence before a small child, touch you today?
8. Look at the second half of verse 11. After bowing low, empty handed, what else do they do to show they recognized Jesus as a great king?
9. In what ways or in what areas of our lives do we struggle to bow down empty handed in humble surrender to Jesus as king, with no agenda, recognizing the first thing he deserves is our hearts?

SESSION 7: SICKNESS AND EVIL AT HIS FEET

The Lord was able to bring pagan astrologers all the way from the east to recognize Jesus as King and to worship him. They bowed low with nothing in their hands first. Our children's Christmas stories showing the wise men holding their gifts, miss out on this radical moment of reverence and submission in the holy presence of the child born to be King. They were not showing off their fancy gifts or introducing themselves as rich and important people. First, they were kneeling with their heads to the ground; giving all the honor to Jesus and accepting their low place before such a high King. They came to worship him as they told Herod. We too need to come first to Jesus with that same heart of bringing nothing in our hands – no agenda, no talents and no plans. We need to fix all of our attention on him and not on ourselves, worshipping all of who he is with all of me. We too need to say, "You are worthy and all that is within me kneels down in love and surrender before you the mighty King." Right at the start of Jesus' life here on earth we see this truth, that God wanted to draw the nations to himself in Jesus and he could use anything he liked to bring them. While the men who did not know God, from far in the East, were bowing at the feet of Jesus; where were God's own people who knew the scriptures and told Herod where the Messiah would be born?

John's gospel explains that Jesus, "the Word," who had been with God, and was God, since before the creation of the world, became human and made a tent: stayed with us and lived like us in our world (John 1:1-3).

John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...*

We can't even imagine what that could be like, for the Creator to become the created. From the very start we watch some of God's own people understand who he is, others ignore and some stand against him. John the Baptist, who was given the task of preparing the way, shows us a beautiful picture of humble awe and expectation of Jesus.

Matthew 3:11 *I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

When he Jesus asks to be baptized, he is willing to identify with us by walking down into the place where our hearts need to be washed clean. Watch John's response:

Matthew 3:14 *But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"*

As Jesus comes out of the water the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove and the Father speaks over him for all to hear (Matthew 3:16-17). It is clear that he is the Son, sent by God the Father, anointed and ready to fulfill what he came into the world to do.

But what does he do next? Instead of some grand show of his incredible power, Jesus goes into the wilderness to face our enemy, the devil. Jesus is tempted to gain power by Satan in the wilderness. As he shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world he says:

Luke 4:7 *"If you worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*

Even Jesus faced temptation to gain power by bowing down to something else instead of going the costly way

that he knew had already been laid out for him. Even he chose to worship and serve God alone. As we watch Jesus walk the Father's way in humility, he calls friends to learn and walk with him. Even they are not the powerful – or even the respected – but, just ordinary men who left everything to go with Jesus in trust. Jesus himself shows us right from the start a pattern of what it looks like to bow down, to be absolutely committed to listen to the Father's will; and to grasp no comfort, honor or glory for himself. The One who owns the universe had no house of his own, but traveled constantly and depended on the hospitality and gifts of others.

As he begins his ministry at 30 years old, Jesus quotes the promises of Isaiah and says they are about him.

Luke 4:18 *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Step by step we watch Jesus walking out this prophesy. He goes to the outcasts and those everyone had labeled as "bad," or, "sinners." He eats with them, showing his full acceptance of them and he is "Good News" to them. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders are horrified and critical that he spends his time loving the unlovely and speaking truth to those everyone else had given up on. They even accuse him of being a drunkard himself because he seems to like being with the broken and the "sinners" so much (Luke 7:34). He helps the blind in spirit see who he is; and those far away from God are invited by Jesus, the King, into the Kingdom of light and life. If we want to stay at the feet of Jesus we will need to go with him beyond the nice and the "respectable" people, to those who do not think God is for them. His footsteps will lead into the broken places; to the difficult, the shocking, the hurting and the addicts; to the shameful, the confused and the crushed. Jesus did not ask us only to follow him into nice churches and clean retreats. He came for the world and we deny who he is if we do not show his love to the world. We do not walk with Jesus if we just huddle together in cozy Christian corners and never take the Good News out, by our prayers, our love, our time and our message.

But Jesus did more than teach and love people. He had the power to "give sight to the blind" and to "set the oppressed free." His human feet, that walked many dirty roads and entered many ordinary houses, were also the place of miraculous healing and new life for many who were brought there by friends or came themselves.

Matthew 15:30 *Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.*

Crowds came after Jesus wherever he went because they knew he had compassion and the power to heal them and restore them completely. The miracles showed them who Jesus was and lead many to trust him. Jesus, the one who carried the authority of the Creator and ruler of the world, could do anything he wanted and all spiritual forces that were not from God also recognized that power. Maybe you fear evil in people and political or religious violence more than the spiritual realm. But ask anyone who has witnessed the supernatural, anywhere in the world, or maybe violence or other religions, and you will hear that destructive spiritual forces are very real. As you read today, be careful to notice that even the most frightening and crushing of dark spirits cannot stand in the presence of Jesus.

Read Luke 8 verses 26 to 39.

1. Read verses 27 and the second half of 29 again. Where is the man living, and what state is he in before he meets Jesus? What have the spirits done to him?
2. Look at Verse 28 again. What does the man do and say when Jesus comes and commands it to go? Who do the spirits in him recognize Jesus to be?
3. How does this show you a picture of the way evil recognizes Jesus and falls at his feet?
4. There are many demons in the man. Read verse 31 and 32. What do they beg of Jesus? How does this show you more of his power and authority?
5. The pigs are thrown into water and destroyed, and the people tell everyone nearby. Look at verse 35 again. Why did the crowd come, and what did they find the man doing when they arrived?
6. How does this picture of the freedom from evil, healing and restoration at the feet of Jesus, touch you today?
7. Read verses 36 and 37. What is the reaction of the people who saw what Jesus did in verse 36, in contrast with the people who had only heard in verse 37? How do these responses reflect how people react today to the power of Jesus over evil?
8. Look at verse 39. The man wants to stay with Jesus, but what does Jesus send him to do? How does he respond?
9. How has this passage shown you a bigger picture the power of Jesus and the reality that evil is brought begging to his feet? How does this picture guide the way you would pray and worship in situations where dark powers may be at work?

SESSION 8: THE GOD WHO BOWED DOWN

Jesus frees the man from destructive demons who had tormented him and made him so aggressive he could not live with other people. The evil that harms us and breaks our relationships, with God and others, falls at the feet of Jesus, begging for mercy. At his command the evil spirits are powerless and Jesus not only drives them out, but heals the man completely and restores him to the community. Many are in awe of Jesus but other people are afraid when they see the authority of Jesus over evil and do not want him to stay around. Our response mirrors their response to the power of Jesus over evil in that some of us worship at his feet and some would rather not think about it because the possibilities are too uncomfortable, so we keep Jesus at a distance. Some of us would like to feel we can control our lives so the idea of any supernatural powers is one we want to ignore.

In the next part of Luke 8 the feet of Jesus continue to be the place of intense love and power. Jairus, a respected Jewish leader, falls at the feet of Jesus, pleading with him to heal his dying daughter. While Jesus is on the way to the house a woman in the large crowd, too ashamed to ask Jesus, touches his robe and is healed instantly. When Jesus asks to speak to her she falls to her knees and pours out her story and he speaks peace to her. As he is speaking to her the news comes that Jairus' daughter has died. But this does not stop Jesus and he restores her to life. Luke chapter 8 gives us a condensed image of the Jesus who can destroy evil, restore, heal and give life where there is only death. He has the compassion and authority to do anything he chooses for those who will come to his feet and this is the same Jesus who calls you to himself today.

In the chapter before this (Luke 7:36-50) we see another important picture of what it means to bow down in a scene that is shadow of what he will later win for us at the cross. A woman, known to live a shameful life, bursts into the gathering of respected Jewish leaders. She comes to the feet of Jesus knowing she needs forgiveness. She pours out her love extravagantly with the expensive oil she uses to anoint his feet, and kisses them. She weeps tears of guilt and sorrow for her broken life and humbly wipes his feet with her hair. She is bowed very low and yet in that place Jesus speaks forgiveness over her, against the judgmental Pharisees and he contrasts her beautiful love with their lack of respect or love. Then he speaks forgiveness and peace to her personally. She is forgiven, washed clean, restored, released from her shame and loved at the feet of Jesus.

The place of bowing low becomes the place of being lifted up into total forgiveness, peace with God, freedom and transformation. The place of pouring out our love for Jesus is the place where his love is poured out on us. But many of us never get to that place. We don't want to come in humility, we don't want to say sorry for our attitudes, what we have thought or done and we don't want to bow low and let Jesus be highest in our hearts. We don't have a heart of love to pour out at the feet of Jesus. So we never fully receive his love or forgiveness and we never hear his words of peace and restoration. Other times we don't come to him because we think like the Pharisees- that God would never want to touch sinful people and if Jesus really knew what we have thought, said or done or even what was done to us, he won't want us near him. As we have seen before both of these, pride and fear of condemnation, keep us away from that place of forgiveness, love and peace with God at the feet of Jesus.

But not everyone who met Jesus was ready to bow down. These verses from John describe how many reacted to Jesus, the light who came.

John 1: 9 *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

Many of God's own people had read the scriptures promising a Messiah, saw the miracles and heard his teaching but would not accept who Jesus was and stood against him. Jesus knows what is ahead. He knows the shocking truth of what it will mean for him to bow down because we could not come to God's feet. He tells disciples repeatedly:

Mark 9: 31 *"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."*

At the Passover supper when the Jews remembered God freeing them from slavery in Egypt to make them his Covenant people, Jesus says his body will be broken and his blood poured out and this will bring in the new Covenant, a new promise for all the world to be forgiven and live in new relationship with God.

And in John 13: 1-17 we see Jesus in another shadow of what he will do for us at the cross. To the shock and amazement of the disciples he bends down to wash their dusty feet. Jesus, the Lord of the universe, is stooping down in the role of the lowest servant, to wash us clean in our hearts. In the garden of Gethsemane we watch Jesus kneeling in anguished prayer. He is bowing down in surrender to God, accepting the cup of suffering needed to do what the Father wants in order to save us.

Luke 22:41-42 *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

Maybe we are so used to the story it doesn't touch us anymore. But we must watch in horror and amazement as the almighty Jesus allows himself to be betrayed, bound and questioned, laughed at and scorned by Jewish leaders. The crowd yells for him to be crucified. Lower and lower he bows for our sakes and we see him kicked and spat on by rough soldiers. They ram a crown of thorns on his head, make him wear a purple robe, and kneel down as they mock him, pretending to hail him as king. (Mark 15:16-20) Jesus was whipped until his back was ripped to shreds and he was physically unable to carry his own cross. But the terrible pain and weakness was only a fraction of the extraordinary sacrifice of bearing public humiliation and standing in our place to carry the weight of our sin. As Jesus is lifted up on a cross he is bowing to the lowest place for you. Ask him to lead you to the cross and show you the scene from the place of his nail - pierced feet.

Read Mark 15 verses 20 to 47.

1. Look again at verse 24. Along with the pain of having his hands and feet nailed to the cross, what do the soldiers take from Jesus as he is lifted up on the cross and humiliated in front of the crowds?
2. Read verse 26 and 27. Without realizing it, what do the Roman leaders do in these verse that show Jesus like a king?

3. Read the insults shouted at Jesus in verses 31 and 32. What did they expect Jesus would do if he really was a savior, Messiah and King? What did Jesus choose to do himself in order to save us?

4. Read verse 33 again. What happens and for how long? How does this touch you with the sense that all of creation is showing the terrible judgement on our sin in the death of God's son?

5. Look at verse 37 and 38. As Jesus cried out and died what happened to the curtain in the temple that separated us from being in the presence of the Holy God? How does this show you what Jesus did for you on the cross?

6. In what ways do you struggle to receive the truths that Jesus chose not to save himself so that he could save you and that his death means the way is open for you to go right into God's presence and live close to him?

7. Read verses 40 and 41. What do you think it was like to watch at the cross? How do these women show you a picture of staying at the feet of Jesus even if it means being with in a place of risk, suffering or humiliation?

8. Look again at verse 43 and verse 46. How does this Jewish leader show risky commitment and costly love for Jesus despite, remaining at his feet even in his death and burial? What do you think it would have been like to handle his body after crucifixion?

9. How does thinking about his scarred, bleeding feet and the corpse in the tomb challenge you and encourage you in what it means to bow at the feet of the God who bowed so far down for you, even taking on your sin and death?

SESSION 9: AT THE FEET OF VICTORY

What was it like to stay at the feet of Jesus through his suffering? As we look back now we see the truth of the scriptures that show us why Jesus was dying and we can believe that it was not a disaster but part of God's plan to save us and reconcile us to himself. The Prophet Isaiah had prophesied hundreds of years earlier:

Isaiah 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

We had turned to our "own ways" and taken the throne of our hearts that should belong to God to rule our own lives. That is what sin means and that is why we could not know God or receive eternal life in his presence. But Jesus carried the weight of our sin until it crushed him, and died a death in our place so that because of his wounds we can be healed completely from everything that leads to eternal death apart from God. There is no other sacrifice that could pay the incredible cost of our rebellion and our refusal to bow down or allow God any control as king in our lives. Jesus didn't have to do it but only his incredible love for us could lead him to the cross.

Romans 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

This is the power of the cross and reason Jesus did not "save himself." He wanted us to be washed clean by his blood where we were filthy in our sin and made right with God in loving relationship again.

Ephesians 2:13 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

The heavy curtain in the temple to keep us out of God's Holy presence had been torn in two so that now we have been "brought near" to God by the cross of Jesus. But those there on that dramatic day did not know that this was the most important event that would change all of world history for eternity. Some were too scared to go where there would be Jewish leaders and Roman officials who might identify them with Jesus. Some were too horrified to face the gruesome sight of hands and feet pierced by huge nails, the pain and the cruel taunting and the slow, exhausting death that crucifixion brought. Others came and saw the spectacle of criminals stripped of their clothes in utter humiliation and lifted up on the crosses for all the crowd to see. They wanted to be there in the moment to see their bleeding and dying and their anguished cries as they struggled for breath. If we want to live at Jesus' feet we have to come to the cross. In our hearts and minds we must not be afraid to look at the great the cost he bore for our sin. We don't go just for the spectacle and the horror but in love and gratefulness to Jesus. In our lives we can be slow to stay close to Jesus where there might be any risk of us suffering with him, maybe by unpopularity or maybe by something he is asking us to lay down that we really like or by handing over control where we want to have things our way. At other times we don't want to gaze on the image of a vulnerable God who feels pain and who was willing to suffer death because the reality of the chains that bound us and held us back from God and out of life could not be could not be broken any other way. We would much rather look at a clean and comfortable empty cross; a

decorative, pretty symbol of Jesus that just seems nice. We like a cross that avoids the mess and pain of our sin, and portrays the way we would like our life of faith to look – convenient and always enjoyable. We often don't want the real cross because it looks too hard, too heavy and that doesn't fit into what we want God to be for us.

The women who stayed at the cross stood at the feet of Jesus and saw the darkness, heard the mocking, watched Jesus suffer a terrible death and listened to his words. They would have been distressed but they did not leave until Jesus had died and had been taken down from the cross, prepared for burial and laid in the tomb. They were wanting to be with him and willing to be known as his whatever the risk and however it broke their hearts to see their Lord put to death. Then there was Joseph of Aramathea who was willing to stand up for Jesus among the Jewish leaders, risking his position as a respected leader himself. He was ready to risk being known to Pilate as a Jesus follower in order to stay with Jesus in his death. Touching the dead body was believed to make him unclean and required ritual washing and blessing from the priests to put it right but Joseph didn't care. He showed a reckless love for Jesus that drew him to handle the body and give him the dignity of a proper burial. In some ways, Joseph offers a compelling picture of the ultimate passion to live at the feet of Jesus, holding his body, touching the bloody wounds from the nails, wrapping his feet in linen, and laying them in a tomb. Jesus was fully dead and Joseph was with him in the grave.

The women also lovingly stayed with Jesus until he was fully buried (Luke 23:55-56) then went home to prepare spices for his body to be put on after the Sabbath. It is a challenging image of passionate dedication and fearless love that is willing to be so close to Jesus that we are touched by his broken body and his bleeding heart for the world. If we don't want to dwell on the thoughts of the real cross, we miss what he has done for us and we do not know his heart for the world. If we only want our Jesus to be successful and look good in the world's eyes, we will struggle to be known as his when it's tough and we will miss his extraordinary love as the God who has suffered when we are in places of suffering ourselves.

But the death of Jesus is not the end of the story. If the Bible finished at these scenes of the closed grave we would not hear of Jesus and would definitely not want to bow down to him. The truth is that as he was bowing low in suffering he was lifted up as Savior and King. Those who mocked him with a crown of thorns and nailed the sign to the cross that said, "King of the Jews," did not understand the full irony of what happened at Golgotha that day. God was working out the first part of his saving plan for us but there is much more to come. As you read today, ask Jesus to lead you by his Spirit to the empty tomb and reveal afresh the power and joy of his victory for you.

Read Matthew 28 verses 1 to 10.

1. Look again at verse 2, 3 and 4. What happened at the tomb and how does it show you God's complete power over death, with no struggle?
2. Read verses 5 and 6. What does the Angel say to the stunned and grieving women? How do you see God's love for them in these verses?

3. Look at verses 7 and 8. Despite the culture that did not value women as reliable witnesses, what are the women asked to do and how do they respond? How does their response encourage and challenge you today?

4. Read verse 9 again. What 3 things do the women do when Jesus meets them? How does their passionate, immediate response to the risen Jesus show you a picture of what our lives could look like?

5. Look at verse 10. Even though he can reveal himself, what does the risen Jesus ask them to do in verse 10? How does he invite us to be part of the same work?

Read John 20 verses 24 to 31.

6. Thomas was not with the disciples the first time Jesus showed himself alive to them. Look at verse 25. What is Thomas' honest statement?

7. Look at verse 27. A week later when the risen Jesus comes to stand amongst his disciples how does he speak directly to Thomas? How does it show you Jesus knew his wrestling heart and wants to patiently help us believe?

8. Look at verse 28. How does Thomas respond when he realizes Jesus really is alive?

9. Jesus tells Thomas many more will believe in him without seeing him. Read verse 31. What does verse 31 say Jesus will use as he patiently helps us believe he is alive and he is God? What does this verse promise we may have if we do believe in Jesus?

SESSION 10: FILLED AT HIS FEET

Jesus did not stay helpless and lifeless in the tomb. When all looked like he was defeated and the light of the world seemed to be extinguished, God raised him from the dead. The women who had stayed with him in his suffering all the way to the grave were the first to see him alive. It sounds obvious but if they had not gone to put spices on the body, willing to identify with him in his death, they would not have met the risen Jesus and shared in his life. We hear this connection between his death and his life again and again throughout the New Testament.

Philippians 3:10 *I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death. . . (NLT)*

2 Corinthians 4:10 *Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. 11 Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. (NLT)*

If we are not willing to be with Jesus in his suffering, to sacrifice any time, enjoyment or personal gain, to risk any comfort or be known as his where our reputation may be at stake, then it is as though we will not stay at the cross or go to the grave with him. If we are not at the grave with him in his suffering then we will miss his resurrection life and these verses from 2 Corinthians seem to be saying that other people may not see his life in us either. In his mercy Jesus constantly and patiently wants to reveal himself to us as the living Lord who is with us. We see his grace for his disciples, knowing what they needed in order to believe he is risen and his heart is the same for you. We can be honest with him about our struggle to believe, as they were and he is waiting to help us. He wants to meet us in his Word as we listen and read. He wants to meet us when we join with other believers. He wants to meet us when we pray by ourselves and with others. Jesus is not hiding himself and complaining that we should have more faith to seek him. He wants to show himself to you in just the ways that he knows your heart needs to see. He wants to fill you with faith to believe like Thomas so you can trust him and wait for him. If you ask him, his heart is longing for you to enjoy a confidence in him who has conquered death and lives with you and for you.

This is the Jesus who said:

"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" (John 11:25-26).

He said it before he died when he was about to bring his friend Lazarus back from the dead, but he shows he truly is "the life" when he defeats death for us and is raised in the power of God. This is the greatest truth that we need to allow to grip us with the reality that Jesus really was who he said he was. Every other prophet or religious leader who has ever lived before us lies dead in the grave but we have a Jesus who is greater than death and shows us he is truly God. Paul wrote about the vital part of this resurrection of Jesus to our faith.

1 Corinthians 15: 17 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

These verses say that there is no forgiveness, no eternal life for us; and the sacrifices we might make in this life are pointless if there is no hope of blessing and reward in eternity. Jesus died a real death for you and has beaten sin and death for you. As **1 Corinthians 15:54** says, *“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”* If this truth drifts from the center of our faith, there is nothing left but nice intentions.

After 40 days of being with the risen Jesus the disciples watched him go back to his Father in heaven. But he has not left us. In fact Jesus told his disciples before he died that his going would bring an even greater blessing:

John 16:7 *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.*

The God who can turn death to life wants to live with us all the time and he knows we need him. He will not leave us alone.

John 14:16 *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—*
17 *the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18* *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*

Jesus is promising that the Spirit of the risen Jesus will live in us as a helper, the one alongside us and we will never be alone. The Spirit wants to lead us in God’s truth, something totally different to what the world says is important. He does not just want to be with us but to live in us. He is not waiting for you to be perfect before he will come in. The Holy Spirit is not for a few special people but for anyone who believes in Jesus and give their heart to him. Jesus knows that even after the power of the cross to cleanse us and bring us forgiveness and peace with God, by ourselves we cannot turn our hearts from self to bow down to him. It is only the Spirit of a holy, selfless God in us who could change us from the inside out. This means not only can anyone be cleansed and freed by the cross, but we can also be healed, transformed and led by the God who is willing to give us himself. No other religion claims to offer anything close to this and no human ideas can imagine the incredible possibility that we can live in Jesus as he lives in us.

His resurrection and his going back to heaven invite us deeper into an amazing reality:

Romans 8:10 *And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. 11* *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. (NLT)*

The Spirit of life, of the God who raised Jesus from the dead wants to come in if we will offer our hearts! He wants to come, not as an occasional visitor, not as a guest, but really make his home in you.

In his last words before the risen Jesus left the disciples he commanded them:

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:4-5, 8).

He asked them to wait expectantly for the gift and promised they would receive power to be his witnesses. Imagine the mess if they had not waited for the Spirit or tried to speak for him without the power? Sadly we don't have to look too far to see believers trying to live for Jesus without the Holy Spirit, in their own character and their own strength. Have we really taken the last words Jesus spoke seriously? So what does it look like when the Helper, the Advocate alongside us, the powerful Spirit of life is welcomed in? Ask Jesus to show you what he longs to do in you as you watch the beautiful drama unfold.

Read Acts 2 verses 1-6.

1. The disciples *"joined together constantly in prayer"* (**Acts 1:14**). Look at verses 2 and 3. What happened when they were together, what did they hear and what did they see? What does the power and personal presence of the Holy Spirit in this scene say to you?
2. Read verse 4 and verse 5. As the fire rested on "each of them" what happened to *all* of them? What were they given the power to do and how do you see Jesus' promises in Acts 1 to fill them and make them his witnesses worked out here?

Read Acts 2 verses 16 to 21.

3. Look at verse 17 and 18. Who does this prophesy from the Old Testament say will receive the Holy Spirit as God pours out? How is this shown in the people groups mentioned in these verses?
4. How does the offer of the Holy Spirit for anyone of any age, each individually, touch you? In what ways do we struggle to believe or expect this promise for ourselves or others and limit God's gracious offer?
5. Look at verse 21 again. What is the radical offer for anyone, anywhere, who will come to Jesus?

Read Acts 9:1-21.

6. Look at verse 1 and 2. What was Saul doing before he met Jesus in his vision? How does this reflect the promise of “everyone” in Acts 2:21?

After Jesus meets Saul in a vision he is blinded and forced to wait for what God will do in him next.

7. Look at Acts 9 verse 10 and 11. How do these verses show you God’s work through the Holy Spirit to lead us carefully and personally, by name? How does this encourage you and challenge you to welcome more of the Spirit’s work in you?

8. Look at verse 20. What does Saul begin to do after he is freed to see and filled with the Holy Spirit?

9. How do you see the Spirit making us witnesses for Jesus, worked out in Saul and how does this show you the transformation he wants to do in you? How much do you expect Jesus to lead you with the same passion and determination to share him with others through his Holy Spirit living in you?

SESSION 11: AT HIS MIGHTY FEET

The disciples waited and prayed just as Jesus had commanded them. The Holy Spirit fell as a fire that separated into flames on each one individually (Acts 2) and we watch the disciples transformed from hiding with the doors locked to an urgent boldness and a desire to share the news of Jesus, Messiah and Savior of the world with everyone. God gives them the language and the words as well as the passion to offer his love and salvation to anyone who would hear. All the way through the Book of Acts we see this same pattern of coming to God, praying as individuals and praying together with other believers. It is only in or because of those times of prayer that they hear where the Spirit is leading next, what to do and who to talk to. It is only in that place that they receive the strength and courage to let the Holy Spirit lead. A lifestyle of bowing down includes being filled with the Holy Spirit when we give our whole heart to Jesus. But there is also a pattern of staying at God's feet, worshiping and praying and waiting constantly for the Holy Spirit to lead us in the where and who and how we live for Jesus.

Where the Holy Spirit is at work, the hardest heart can be turned to Jesus. Even those like Saul, who was persecuting the believers, can be brought to the feet of Jesus. No one is too far away for God's Spirit to draw them near to him. They may hate Christianity, they may be confused by other religions or ideologies, they may be broken by deep hurts, distorted relationships and addictions or they may just be busy living for enjoyment and pleasure with no thought for anything deeper, but God's Spirit can still turn them around. If we think we can somehow change people's hearts by our own efforts or try to live a life that draws them to Jesus without him working in us and through us by the Holy Spirit, we will soon be frustrated. When we are not praying for his Spirit to move in others and we are not waiting to be filled at his feet there is no hope of those we meet seeing Jesus in our lives or opening their hearts to him. We ourselves will see no change in our thoughts, words or actions if we try hard to live God's way without welcoming the Holy Spirit day by day and choice by choice, to lead us. Jesus says he wants us to remain in him and remain in his love, to make our home in him so he can remain or abide in us. He says we must stop trying to be the tree and let him do that, accepting we are a branch receiving life through the Spirit from him, rather than trying to do anything or bear fruit in our own love, strength or wisdom.

John 15:4 *Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

Remember the temple, a physical representation of the reality of heaven and the way God's presence was given to his people (see Hebrews 10). The Most Holy Place, closest to God's presence, was not a place they could go. Only the high priest could go in to offer a sacrifice. But when Jesus died, the curtain blocking this holy place was torn from top to bottom. The cross and resurrection made a way so we can come into the Holy Place at his feet. There is no need for you to stay outside. Jesus, our great high priest has offered the sacrifice of his own life for our rebellion and he is praying for us.

Hebrews 10:19 *And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. (NLT)*

Because he died and rose for us, it is possible to come in. Jesus has opened the way in and we are made clean by his blood. We are accepted and made right with God so we can come right into his presence. We do not have to stay in the doorway or linger outside feeling unworthy or hoping that maybe one day we will come near. You have been welcomed and invited in to meet with God. So we have to make sure we are coming in and making patterns and habits that keep us in his presence. We need other believers to stand with us in this and worshiping and praying with others is part of those patterns that will keep us drawing near. We need to get together, call, maybe text and Facebook to pray for and with each other. Here is the amazing news of the Holy Spirit – that not only can we come into God’s presence, but he wants to put his presence in us. He wants to fill us with himself. We never have to be apart from him, we never have to be self-sufficient and we do not have to just be dragged and controlled by every circumstance, emotion and reaction, giving up the throne that should be his.

2 Corinthians 5:14 *For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Now, because of his Holy Spirit who lives in us and with us, Jesus can lead us to his feet to live for him instead of pleasing ourselves. His cross, resurrection and the giving of his Spirit have set me free to live for him, instead of just for me and my family. My perspective of what is important or what is not good can be so based on my feelings that change from day to day, my personality type and my tendency to see no further than the present. But that does not have to be what drives all of my thoughts and actions. Jesus has freed us to live for him who died and rose again and he wants to lead me in what really matters, what he knows is good for me and the things that will last forever. If you get frustrated with your own reactions or long for a more meaningful purpose, or fear being out of control, the answer is not to try harder but to bow further at God’s feet. There you can allow your own desires (the flesh) to be “crucified” at the cross and let the Holy Spirit lead you in the real, love- filled, abundant life Jesus wants for you.

Galatians 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

The Lord wants to lead you step by step in his Spirit for everything and every moment of your life and grow you fruit by fruit. This is fantastic news! 2 Corinthians 5: 14-15 says Jesus can captivate our hearts so that we long to offer his love that died and rose for us. He longs to pour out his love by his Spirit in us so that we let him drive how we see other people and choose to give his love to every person, even the really difficult ones. When the Holy Spirit is really at work in our hearts we cannot keep the love of Jesus to ourselves. From distant countries or people of other religions to our family members or friends who are just not interested, he will ask us to join him in his heart for others as we are filled at God’s feet. But we think, “It is so scary and hard to share him and so different to the culture around us to speak his truth.” “What if people don’t respect us, don’t like us or even hate us?” “What if living his way does not fit with the people around me?” Many around the world already live in this reality of the cost of living for Jesus and sharing him with others. The only way we will be able to let go of our instincts to keep things easy and comfortable is if the Holy Spirit leads us to a bigger, truer picture of who Jesus is and his authority and power over all the world and all eternity. Ask him to enlarge your vision as you read of the risen, exalted Jesus today.

Read Revelation 1 verses 13 to 18.

This vision echoes some of what was shown to Daniel, in a time of great suffering for God's people when Babylon seemed to be in control (Described in Daniel 7, especially verses 9, 13 and 14). The revelation was shown to John (see Revelation 1) in a terrible time of danger and persecution for those who believed in Christ.

1. Read verses 13. In this echo of the Daniel 7 vision, Jesus is dressed something like a priest who prays for us and represents us before God and is described as the "Son of Man." Why do you think God knows we need to see this vision of Jesus alive and praying for us, especially in times of suffering and violence against believers?
2. Look at verse 14 again. How is the risen Jesus described here? How does this picture show his glory, purity and power?
3. Read verses 15 and 16. What do these verses say? How does this image reveal the beauty and authority of Jesus and his mighty voice?
4. How do these descriptions in verses 15 and 16 deepen our understanding of the place of Jesus' word, and his voice in our lives and in our world? How does it call you to listen closely?
5. Read verse 17. What does John do in the face of such glory and power and what does Jesus do and say in response? How does this touch you?

SESSION 12: AT HIS FEET FOR ETERNITY

Jesus holds the keys. He is the first and the last. You can trust him with your eternity. Neither death, tragedy nor sickness is ultimately in control of your life. World leaders, terrorists, religions and events are not the first and the last. Past experiences, painful wounds, circumstances, feelings, finances, health and treatments are not the first and last if we have given our all to Jesus. Jesus reassures us again that because he is the one who died our death and carried our sin so he is also the one who has the keys of death and Hades. This means not just the keys for death itself but our eternity, the place of death so he is the only one who can open the gates to life and welcome us into eternity at his feet. The words in the vision given to John in the midst of persecution and violence against believers echo images in the vision given to Daniel in a time as defeated exiles in Babylon.

Daniel 7:13 *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. **14** He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."*

Jesus has the last word and holds all eternity in his hands. World leaders, religious leaders and terrorists, governments and anyone who seems to hold authority over you will ultimately be powerless at the feet of Jesus. Those who seem to hold the keys and reign in this world will not have any control in eternity, so Jesus says you do not have to be afraid. You are not the first and the last, and the events and powers in our world are not in control either. You can live in hope, trusting in the real King, Jesus, whose authority cannot be shaken and whose Kingdom will last forever. This prayer from Ephesians is asking for his light to open our hearts to grasp that reality.

Ephesians 1: 18 *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, **19** and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength **20** he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, **21** far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

This Scripture says we have an eternal inheritance, a share in the glory and joy and peace of the Father along with Jesus the Son for all eternity. Can you imagine? But that does not just begin when we die. These verses tell us God wants to fill us with the same power that brought Jesus back to life and lifted him up to reign higher than any other power or name. To live at the feet of Jesus is to bow to one who is so high there is no human authority or spiritual force above him. There is nothing that can shake his throne and when we bow down before him in the attitude of our hearts, we come under his authority for us and over every other power. Therefore his feet are the place of protection for now and for eternity. We can rest there if we have given him the throne of our hearts, knowing that we are safe in his royal presence forever. That does not mean difficult things will not come our way but that Jesus is higher and greater than them and ultimately they cannot rob us of the inheritance we have for eternity.

But what does it look like to know who we are to God and know who he wants to be to us? How do we live out our royal identity and the hope of our glorious inheritance in Christ? Does it mean that we view ourselves as above everyone else and see people or the present as worthless? Philippians 2 says the ultimate shape of a lifestyle of bowing down is the pattern of Jesus.

Philippians 2:3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

We cannot ever fully grasp this mind-blowing truth, that Jesus, who knew he was equal with God, humbled himself or emptied himself to the lowest place. He bowed under the weight of our sin and lay in our grave. The one most worthy to be served became a servant to us and therefore he was lifted up to the highest place. If we have the “mind of Christ” we will be ready to be lower in the world’s eyes and to value and serve others now rather than live for self. We will not be distant from the people around us but the most connected people showing the deepest, selfless love. Having the same attitude as Jesus will mean loving the world with God’s own heart. But this will mean we are raised up with Jesus for all eternity.

Colossians 3:1 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

This is really good news. We so often feel the “earthly things” like eating, keeping home, health, bills, deadlines, hard relationships, living environments and events consume us; and our minds are brought low. This verse says because you have already been raised up and brought to life, the Holy Spirit can heal you and free you to lift up the eyes of your heart where Jesus reigns. It says if you have bowed down, you have died to the old self and you have a new life that is hidden with Christ in God. Not only that but Jesus is your life ultimately, not your hurts, not the laundry and the cooking, not your skills or achievements, not your job, not even your relationships or those you care for, but Christ himself. He is your life. You have been brought into the throne room of the King of kings, so set your heart, your attention and your passion on things above, where Jesus reigns as King. As you read and listen to the word, as you worship with others and pray alone and with others he will lift your eyes to make the things that matter to him matter to you. He will strengthen you and lead you to put your energy, time and passion into the things that last forever, not just the temporary tasks, situations and possessions of daily life. Even in the hardest struggles, the exhausting roles, the most painful suffering or the most ordinary, boring routines and tasks, we can live for eternity, not just today. I can live for Jesus and with Jesus and in Jesus, not just for me in my strength.

What Jesus promises for eternity changes the way we look at life now. This is the radical perspective of those who want to live at his feet.

2 Corinthians 4:17 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Whatever we face now seems small and light compared to the glory and joy of what Jesus has promised us. This world is not all there is and the New Testament tells us over and over, it is not our permanent home. So through the Holy Spirit we can choose to set our hearts on what we cannot see and what lasts forever. Jesus talks about storing up “treasures in Heaven” (Luke 12), not putting our hope in stability and possessions and personal gain here in the world. He offers an exciting focus on doing those things that make him your treasure and giving away instead of storing up, so that your treasure will last forever. And if you read scripture, forever looks really good. It is not that we will have to go on and on, just the same as we always have been but will be raised completely new.

1 Corinthians 15:43 *Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. 44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies...* (NLT)

Our world too will not go on and on the same, but Jesus, the first and the last, has authority to roll up all of history, destroy Satan and death, judge rightly and bring about a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 20-21). Revelation constantly says that the people who get to enjoy being with God forever are the ones who have “overcome”. They are those who have not given in to pleasing self or fear of risk and have overcome everything that would tempt them to give their hearts to something else or keep them from bowing down. They are not those who have always succeeded in the world’s eyes and many have suffered harshly in the fight to live at God’s feet and carry the name of Jesus. Maybe they are our inspiration for what it looks like to live a lifestyle of bowing down. The hope of heaven is not just being in a nicer place, but that we get to be *with God* forever and where he is there is real rest.

Revelation 21:3-4 *...God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.* (NLT)

Those around the indescribable throne of heaven “*fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God...’*” (**Revelation 4:10-11**). This is the ultimate picture of what it means to live a lifestyle of bowing down, laying before him all of ourselves and any honor we have in surrender and adoration. When we bow our hearts before him we join with all heaven in crying out praise to the one who has lovingly saved us to be his own and who is holy and mighty and worthy of all worship (Revelation 4, 5, 7, 19). We often live so far beneath this incredible calling to be all his for all eternity, to live at the throne of the King of kings. As you look at the descriptions of incredible beauty and abundant life with God, ask Jesus to lift up your head and lead you to passionately set your hope on the certainty and joy of staying at his feet forever.

Read Revelation 21 verses 15 to 27 and Revelation 22 verses 1 to 5.

1. Look again at verses 18 to 21. What are the images here of the foundations and structures of the new heaven? How do they show you the glory, worth, purity, and beauty of the eternal city of God in comparison to the things of earth that we know now?

2. Read verse 22. Why does the city need no temple, a place to go and worship God? How does this promise to always be in his presence touch you today?
3. Look again at verse 23 and verse 25. How do these verses describe the promise of no fear and no darkness in God's presence?
4. Verses 24 and 26 echo the prophecy of Isaiah 60 that "nations," people from all over the world, have been welcomed in because of the cross. Nations are drawn to the light so that even kings will bring their splendor into the heavenly city, but not everyone or everything will be allowed into the place where God reigns. Read verse 27. What does this verse say about who is able to come in and how Jesus, the Lamb sacrificed for our sin to save us, will decide? How do these words challenge you today?
5. Read Chapter 22, verse 1. How does this verse describe abundant life and where is it coming from?
6. Look at 22, verse 2 again. What do you see in this picture of God returning and restoring all that was lost when we rebelled against him, wanting to choose for ourselves what was good and evil, in the Garden of Eden? What does the tree of life provide every month, never lacking, and what can the leaves bring?
7. Read 22 verses 3 and 4. Now the curse from our broken relationship with God in the beginning has been broken. How do these verses describe our belonging to Jesus and being at his feet forever?
8. Look at 22, verse 5. What do these verses repeat will not be in heaven and why not? What enormous promise is given in the last part for those who belong to Jesus?
9. How do these descriptions of being with Jesus forever in abundant life and reigning with him strike you today? Where do you struggle to believe these promises for yourself? If we really grasped these amazing truths how would we live our lives differently?

Personal Review

BRINGING ALL THAT I AM TO HIS FEET

As we have looked at the big salvation story in the Bible, I hope you have seen that God's feet are the best place to be. This review is for you to do alone with Jesus not in a group time. Take time to look back at each session and write down what has particularly touched you or the images or scriptures that you need to pray on some more.

At the Lord's feet we get to see how great he is and receive his love. When we stay there we find he wants to give us his forgiveness, deliverance, help and freedom. In that place we get to listen to his voice, hear his heart for us and see his beauty and majesty. If we will come and bow down in the deep places of our hearts and bring him every attitude, emotion and desire; if we will bring him every experience, good and bad, he will come in to each one. When we welcome him and surrender all of ourselves, he comes as King, as good shepherd, as Savior, as loving Father, as healer, as victor who fights for us and as the High Priest who prays for us. If we lay down all that we are and all that we have, Jesus receives us and holds us in his hands as the one who can fill every part of us to be his own and give his presence to us and to others around us through us. His hands are good hands and you can trust that he will not drop anything but take every part of you, even what you thought was wasted. If we allow him to and trust him with every part of us, he will purify and clean and make beautiful and win back what the Enemy thought was his. He will come by his Holy Spirit and transform us, lead us and raise us up in his love.

This is a guide to help you think about what it might mean to give all of yourself to Jesus and bow down with all that you are. This is not something we only do once as we will need to give much of this to him in different situations, different seasons of life and different emotions. But as you have studied this series it is a reference point for you to take time to come to God's feet with all that you are. It is not that you are giving up all of these

things but that you are handing them to Jesus and trusting him with what is needed in each one. You are saying “I am yours and I don’t want to hold anything back from you”

As you come pray **“Holy Spirit come into my heart and mind; show me what is important, show me where I am holding back. Lead in your love me to real surrender, help me and free me to trust you with every part of me.”**

Take days, weeks or months over this so that you are not writing lists as you come to each part pray; **“Jesus I come to your feet, I give you everything and I trust you with this.”**

Stay with him and let him meet you so that you are really coming to his feet and giving him space to do all that he longs to do in your heart and mind and in your life. Make sure that as you give each part of yourself to him, you also welcome God to give himself to you. Some parts will take a long time and often we need to give them more than once to really trust him with them. Expect Jesus to show you important things, lead you to ask forgiveness, carry the heavy burdens, break the power of memories or thought patterns over you. Expect Jesus to heal and set you free where you have been wounded or bound. Invite him to speak truth where there have been distortions or lies. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to be willing if God asks you to hand over something that is coming between you and him or leading you out of his good ways. Ask God to bring you to the cross so that the blood of Jesus covers and protects you and you see his incredible love, forgiveness and freedom for you. Ask Jesus to fill you with the Holy Spirit to transform you, make you new and move you to want what he wants in you. This may be really hard but I pray you will meet him in it and he will do amazing works in your heart and life.

You may find that you need to pray with someone else about some of those parts that are painful or confusing; where there is any sense of darkness or where you want to hold back. You may find you need someone to walk with you longer term in some of the things that come up.

This may be a long process of years to receive forgiveness, be healed, set free and remade, but it starts with trusting Jesus and laying everything at his feet.

Above all know that you are coming to the one who knows you and loves you and in everything you give him, ask him to minister his love to you.

Psalm 95: 6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; ***7*** for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

COMING TO HIS FEET WITH YOUR PAST

Important Childhood experiences

Particularly important memories of family relationships (good and bad)

Traumatic events that connect to you (for you, your family, your friends)

Memorable words spoken over you by others (names, hurtful responses, expectations, what you are or how you should be)

Memories and things that were **not** said or done for you

Broken, damaging or distorted relationships and personal encounters

Thoughts about yourself that have continued to influence you (good or bad)

Regrets or areas where you have not asked God for forgiveness for attitudes, words and actions or habits in the past

Guilty feelings where you have repented but have not received his forgiveness for the past

Other parts of your past that you just need to give to Jesus

COMING TO HIS FEET WITH YOUR PRESENT

Your training, achievements, skills and talents or spiritual gifts

Your personality, strengths and weaknesses

Your time and routines

How you spend your free time – (including entertainment and what you take into your mind through watching, reading or listening)

How you think and feel about your body (health issues, food, exercise, looks, sexuality)

Your present family relationships (Parents, siblings, relatives, in-laws, children)

Friendships

Your thoughts, feelings and attitudes about male/female relationships (including marriage)

Areas in life where you feel disappointed or discouraged

Habits, addictions and repeated thoughts, words or actions that you know are not helpful for you

Responses and reactions to other people- in attitudes, thoughts and words

How other people think of you or how you would like them to think of you

Any feelings of anger or places you need to forgive (maybe towards God, others or yourself)

Attitudes, words or actions that you know are not God's best for you or are against what he says in the Bible; anything where you need to him for ask forgiveness and invite the Holy Spirit to change your heart.

All that you possess and your finances (including needs and debt)

Your comforts, needs and what you want

Anywhere you are putting your hope (e.g. I would be happier or complete if.....)

The place you live, your environment, community and connections with neighbors

Questions or areas where you feel confused (including about God)

Anything else you have not given to Jesus in your present feelings and situations

COMING TO HIS FEET WITH YOUR FUTURE

Your hopes and desires for you and your family

Areas you think God might want to lead you or work through you

Any worries or fears for yourself

Your worries or fears for others in your life

Feelings about danger, illness or death

Thoughts, doubts and attitudes to Bible promises about eternity