

Encounters with Jesus:
A study of the Women of John's Gospel



© Painting by artist Laura Ury

Titus Women
Fall Bible Study 2023
Led by Cricket Albertson
Artwork by Laura Ury

Welcome to Encounters with Jesus: A study of the Women of John's Gospel



The Titus Team is so excited you are here!

A few reminders as we get started...

You are a valuable part of this study. We want to hear from you—your thoughts and insights and your ideas! Titus Women wants to make Jesus known through Bible studies, practical resources, and daily living. When we talk together, God can move in powerful ways. Feel free to email or call the office at any time (office@tituswomen.org / 859-858-4222). Together, we are encountering Jesus. Together, we are being filled with His Spirit. Together we walk with Him.

At any time, if you need to pray with someone, our team is available. We stand back-to-back in prayer for one another. We have seen Jesus work miracles by connecting women through prayer.

Titus has a daily prayer call at 8:00am EST, 602-609-9676. You are welcome to join us as we pray for revival, our prodigals, and our communities. Visit our website for more details, resources, and opportunities to connect.

AND NOW TO JOHN....

This study began in 2020. That infamous year, filled with so many societal upheavals and personal struggles, forced me to slow down in my Bible reading. As everyone moved home, life slowed down on the outside and became constant activity on the inside, so I decided to change my Bible study reading and simply cover one chapter of John's gospel every day. For 21 days, I faithfully read my chapter, drinking in the words and stories of Jesus. After three weeks, I had read John through one time, and I decided to start all over and read it again—one chapter a day for 21 days. By the time I finished the second go-around, I noticed something unusual about the stories in John. I noticed there were many stories about women and most of them were long stories—not brief snippets but developed and thoughtful episodes in Jesus' life. Then, I recognized that Jesus spoke some of His "I AM" statements to the women in these stories. Then, I observed that the stories began with His mother and ended with Mary Magdalene—some might say 'the best and the worst' of women. And finally, and with a shock, I realized that there were seven stories if we include the woman in John 8.

I began re-reading these stories—one after another, amazed by John's inclusion of the women in his gospel and astounded by Jesus' honest and open dialogue with these women. Curious, I thought, "Maybe John wrote seven specific stories about men too," so I went back and read the rest of the stories, but John did not. The stories about men are open ended and mixed with Jesus' theological monologues and challenges to the Pharisees. They include individuals and groups, disciples and Pharisees without any clear boundaries. I concluded that the stories about these women were intentionally written.

These women were transformed by Jesus.

These encounters were written in God's eternal redemptive story.

These stories are our stories.

Jesus saw, engaged, comforted, protected, challenged, provided for, called,
and sent these women. Their lives were changed by Jesus.

He wants to encounter us as well.



Each week in our homework, we will look at the context for these stories, placing each woman's encounter with Jesus into the overall redemption story told by John. There will be five days of homework each week. The lessons are designed to help us dig deeper into God's Word. Our purpose for this Bible study is not "knowledge about" but knowing God and being known by God.

Like the women in the book of John, Jesus wants to encounter each one of us. Then, we will begin to understand what Jesus meant in John 17:3, when he said,

"And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

PROLOGUE

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK

Before we get started, we need to do a little preview on John's understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in personal encounters with Jesus. The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in John's gospel, and we begin to understand the nature of the Trinity and the nature of how God interacts with His creation.

I invite you to ask the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to bear witness to the person of Jesus in your own heart, soul, mind, and life (John 15:26). Ask the Holy Spirit to speak the words of Jesus deep into your person and bring His words to your mind throughout the day (John 14:23,15:13). Ask Him to glorify Jesus in your life (John 15:14). We do not study the words of Jesus for knowledge but in order to know Him and be known by Him—the Holy Spirit accomplishes this work in us.

When we come to study the Bible, we do not come alone! We come in the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit becomes our teacher so we can understand the words of Jesus. Like the two men on the Emmaus Road listening to Jesus, the Holy Spirit walks with us and teaches us about the way of Jesus. He explains Jesus' words to us and makes sense of all of God's story so that we can each understand. He gives each person spiritual wisdom, insight and knowledge (Ephesians 3:16–19) so that each one might know the depth of God's love and the fullness of God Himself in daily life.

Before we get started on the women in John, let's look at the role of the Holy Spirit in John. The passages below will help us understand the One who is weaving this story together and enabling people 2000 years later to find abundant life in Jesus. By the Holy Spirit's invitation, we come to Jesus—welcomed and wanted!!

- The same Spirit who descended on Jesus at the Jordan River is the Spirit who bears witness to Jesus in our own lives (John 1:32).
- He is the One who enables us to see Jesus for who He really is (John 1:33).
- Anyone who is born of the Spirit will receive the Kingdom of God (3:5).
- The Holy Spirit is out of our control, and yet Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask (3:8). The Spirit is bestowed not coerced or controlled.
- God the Father will give the Holy Spirit without measure, and the Spirit speaks the words of God into our lives. This is a living promise (3:34).
- Jesus has come and encounters us so that we might worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (4:23). The Father is spirit, so when we worship Him through the Holy Spirit, we enter His immediate presence.

- The Spirit gives life to all who seek Jesus (6:63). Romans 8 declares that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us to bring resurrection life now.
- If anyone is thirsty, come to Jesus and drink and out of your life will flow rivers of living water through the Spirit of Jesus (7:39).
- He is the Spirit of truth, and though the world cannot see Him, we know Him (14:17).
- He is the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. He proceeds from the Father and testifies of Jesus (15:26).
- The Holy Spirit
 - Guides us into all truth.
 - Speaks not of Himself but of Jesus.
 - Speaks what He hears.
 - Shows us what is to come.
 - Glorifies Jesus.
 - Receives what belongs to Jesus and gives it to us (John 16:13).

As Jesus mediates the New Covenant through His body and His blood, He, through the Holy Spirit, mediates and enables an intimacy and immediacy between the person of Jesus and the believer, so that the New Covenant can be a living reality in every person's life. As Jesus came to make the Father known, the Spirit lives to make Jesus known, and through the Holy Spirit we see the face of Jesus and then the face of the Father.

He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. -John 7:38



OUR METHOD FOR BIBLE STUDY

Each week, our homework will delve into the context surrounding the story. Some weeks will have more extensive homework, especially the ones that pull us back into the Old Testament. At each Tuesday teaching session, we will look at the story from five different angles—these seven stories can be seen and studied from each of these different ways, and each one is powerful and life-changing. We want to do an overview of all of them, so that we can see these stories in the fullest way possible.

First, we will ask theological questions. What does this story teach us about the heart of God? What does it teach us about the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection? The purpose of John is that we would have life—eternal and abundant. These stories are windows into the heart of God; in His heart, we will find our life. Our spiritual lives will only be as rich as our theology allows, so we ask the Spirit to open our minds to truth.

Secondly, we will ask context questions. Why is the placement of each of these stories important? What comes before and after in each story. We do not want to read these stories in isolation, they are part of the larger story of Jesus written by John, and the context will open our minds to the depth of this story. These questions are an invitation to get lost in the richness of the story and to explore how it fits together. This part always leads me to worship.

Thirdly, we will ask personal questions. Each woman mattered in her own right. God included her in Jesus' story for a very particular reason, and in each woman's story we see ourselves, and the needs of our own hearts. We want to encounter Jesus through the stories of these women, not just in our heads but in our hearts as well.

Fourthly, we will ask missional questions. Every story is for the sake of someone else. Any time God works in a person's life, it has life giving results in the lives of others. As the stream of life flowing from the temple, God always wants to reach the next person. Each of these stories focuses on a woman, but her story reaches beyond her to the world. Like Ruth, in the Old Testament, one woman walking in the light, enables the story of God to continue, to grow, to find fulfillment.

Lastly, we will ask practical questions. The Good News is beautiful, and we can get lost in the wonder of the story of Jesus, but how does it affect our actual lives with pressing issues, concerns and pain? Each of these seven stories has a radically practical application in our own lives. We will open ourselves to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to speak Jesus' words to our lives on the most practical level. We will be "Marthas" in our application of God's word and "Marys" in our worship as we find our life in Him.

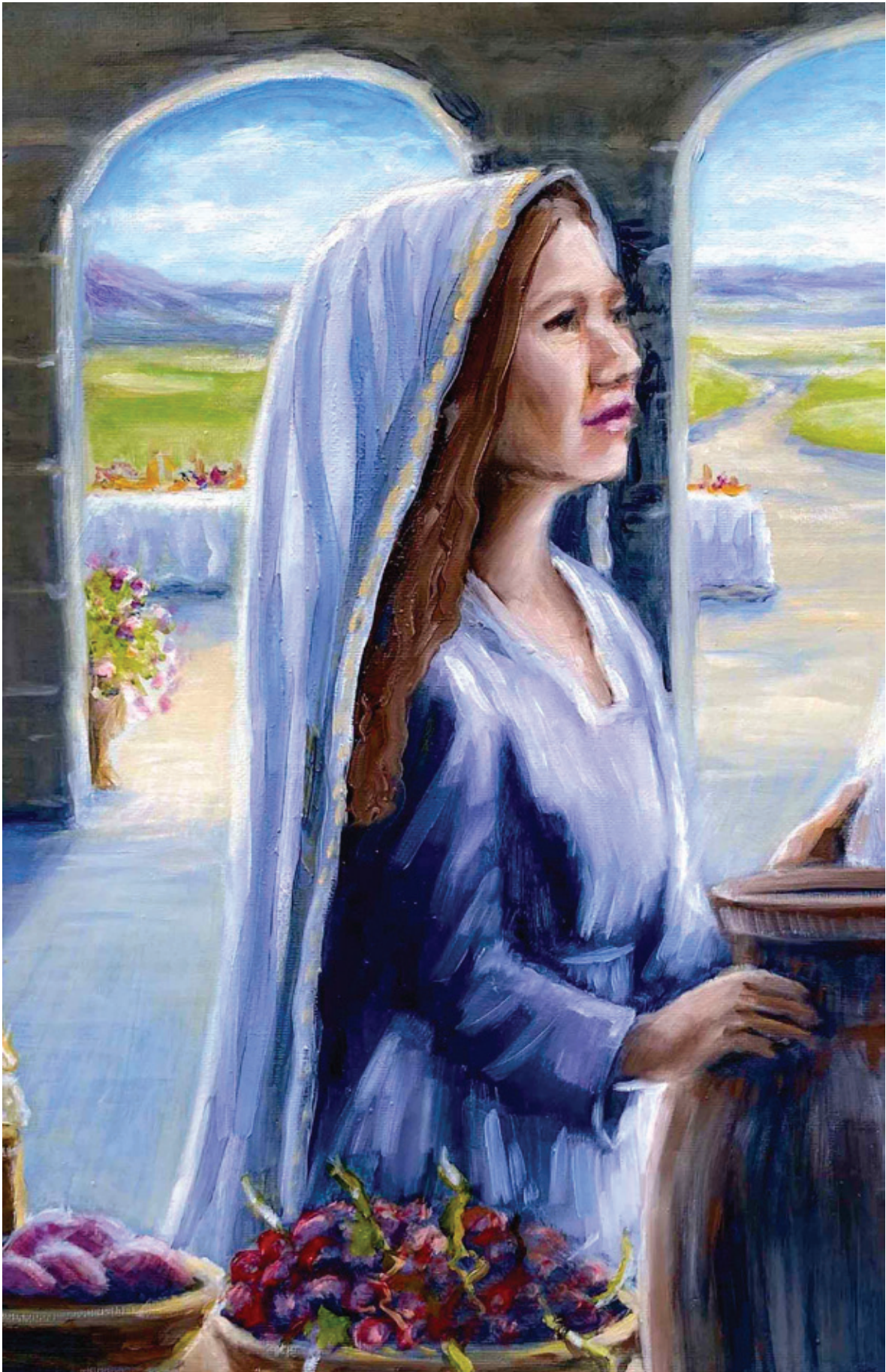
Week # 1

THE BRIDEGROOM HAS COME



“Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.” –Luke 1:38

“Do whatever he tells you.” –John 2:5

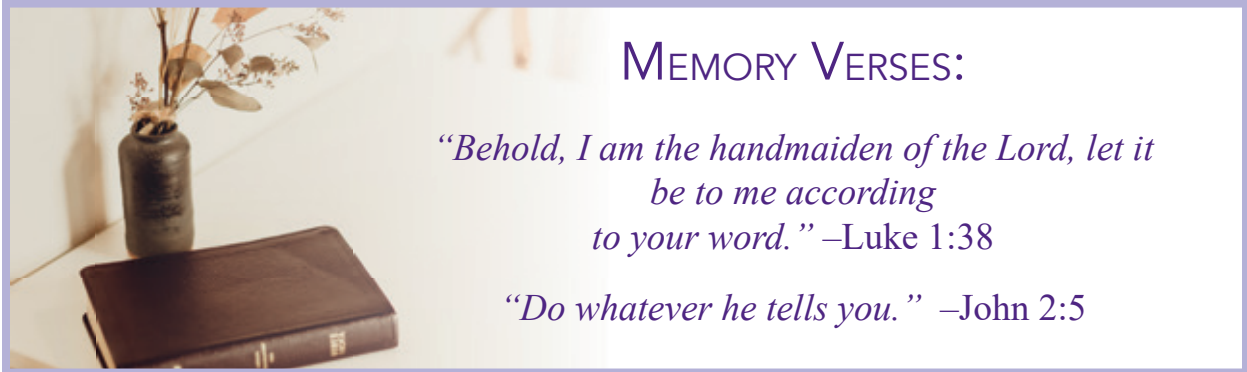


© Painting by artist Laura Ury

WEEK ONE

THE BRIDEGROOM HAS COME

JOHN 2:1–12



MEMORY VERSES:

“Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.” –Luke 1:38

“Do whatever he tells you.” –John 2:5

JESUS’ MOTHER AT THE WEDDING OF CANA

Mary, the mother of Jesus, will feature in two of our seven weeks of Bible study. Both in John 2 at the wedding of Cana and in John 19 at the cross, Mary releases her son into the hands of His Father to do the work that God has given Him to do. At the beginning of His ministry and at the end of His ministry, she is present—encouraging, trusting, loving her son. What kind of woman was Mary? How did she have the grace and the wisdom to step into this role that God planned for her life? To understand this, we must look at Luke 1.

DAY 1 – BACKGROUND

Read Luke 1:26-45.

As you go through this familiar passage, read slowly, and meditate on the angel's promises and comforts. He is announcing the Savior of the world to a young woman whose life will be radically connected with the Son of God. Her destiny as well as the destiny of the entire world, past and future, will be determined by God's action at this moment in history. This is the pivot moment. Pay attention to the words of the angel and the response of Mary.

Write out each of the angel's words to Mary about her special assignment.

"Greetings, O _____ one. The Lord is _____ you."
–Luke 1:28

"Do not _____, Mary, for you have found _____ with God."
–Luke 1:30

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall call His name _____." –Luke 1:31

"He will be _____ and will be called the _____. And the Lord God will give Him the _____ of his father David, and he

will _____ over the house of Jacob forever, and OF HIS KINGDOM _____." –Luke 1:32–33

Mary responds in amazement, "How can this be?"

The angel answered her, "The _____ will come upon you, and the power of the _____ will overshadow you. The child to be born will be called _____." –Luke 1:35

Mary said, "Behold, I am the _____ of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word."

MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary's praise focuses on who God is and what He is doing in her life and in His own redemption story. How does she see herself? How does this poor, young woman accept the promise of God without insecurity, fear, or presumption? She has a clear idea about who her God is, and she trusts Him. That trust in God is the foundation of her life story.

For He has _____ on the humble estate of His servant.

He who is _____ has done important things for me. Holy is His name.

His _____ is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.

He has shown _____ with His arm.

He has scattered the _____ in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the _____ from their thrones and _____ those of low degree.

He has _____ the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty.

He has _____ His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." –Luke 1:46-55

DAY 2

We turn from Mary's story to John's prologue in John 1. From the story of a small-town young woman, we find ourselves abruptly amid the story of the creation of the world. This baby, whom Mary carried, is also the Creator of the universe.

Read John 1:1–18.

This passage of scripture is one of the most important ones in the New Testament because it directly identifies Jesus with God the Father in creation. This passage undergirds our understanding of the triune nature of God. Make a list of the statements about the Word (Jesus), keeping in mind the statements from Luke 1. Here are the first three... (I counted nineteen statements ☺). By going slowly and writing out each statement, we understand better the meaning of God's coming into human history, and we understand better Mary's role as His mother.

In the beginning was the Word

The Word was with God.

The Word was God.

DAY 3

In the passages of scripture surrounding the wedding of Cana, we have witnesses given about Jesus from John the Baptist. John's witness opened the door for Jesus to step into the Jewish redemptive story and into the redemptive story for the entire world.

Read John 1:19–34.

1. If you had to dramatize John the Baptist's witness to Jesus to the Pharisees, his disciples and the crowds, how would you retell his witness. In verses 19–23 John declares who he is and what his purpose is.

2. What is not John's identity?

3. What is his purpose and calling?

4. When they ask him why he is baptized, he points their attention to another. What does he say about Jesus? Why is his witness important?

5. In verses 29–42, John gives his witness about Jesus to the crowds and to his own disciples. He makes seven statements about who Jesus is. Briefly summarize each of these statements.
 1. John 1:29

 2. John 1:30

 3. John 1:31

 4. John 1:32

 5. John 1:33

 6. John 1:34

 7. John 1:36

DAY 4 – THE SECOND PART OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S WITNESS OF JESUS

After the wedding of Cana, Jesus cleanses the temple and meets with Nicodemus, the teacher of the Jews. Jesus has fully engaged with the Father's purpose for Him, stepping into His public ministry with a dramatic flourish of claiming authority over the temple activities and a clandestine meeting with the ruler of the synagogue at night in which He states His purpose for the entire world (John 3:14–21).

And then, we have one more witness from John the Baptist before he steps out of the story and allows Jesus to step up. John and Mary have both a similar role in announcing and preparing the way and then retreating to the back of the story so Jesus can take center stage. Listen to John's last witness to Jesus.

Read John 3:22–36.

John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

1. John announces that he is the friend of the bridegroom (verse 3:29).

This is the second time John uses the marriage metaphor in the first three chapters of his book. Why do you think this is significant? Is John bearing witness to the intimacy that God desires with His people?

2. Jesus is from above and is above all (3:31).

John compares himself to Jesus. One is above all, and one is of the earth. Is John bearing witness to the divine nature of the Son? What does it mean that Jesus is above all?

3. Jesus is bearing witness to what He has seen in the heart of God (3:32–34).

Jesus has been in the heart of God Himself, and now He comes to the world—sharing what He has seen and known in God's heart. To see the heart of the Father, we look at Jesus!! When you look at Jesus, what do you discover about the heart of God?

4. Jesus is loved by the Father and all things have been given Him by the Father (3:35).
Jesus has authority over all creation, given to Him by the Father. The cleansing of the temple and instructing the temple leaders are natural outcomes of this divine authority. Does Jesus have authority in your life? Does He have permission to be who He really is?

5. Whoever believes in this one will have eternal life (3:36).
In Jesus is LIFE, and all who know Him know life—now and forever. This is John's message of salvation. In Jesus is life!! That life is available to you and to me. What does it mean to find our life in Jesus? How does finding our life in Him put us right in the heart of God the Father? Spend some time praying on this and write out your thoughts.

DAY 5

Finally, we come to our main story!!! This is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, and a most unusual beginning. After John 1, we expect Jesus to burst on the scene like He does in the cleansing of the temple, but instead we have an encounter between Jesus and His mom at a wedding party. It is her confidence in Him and in the timing of God that creates an opportunity for Him to step into His Father's work for Him.

Read John 2:1–12.

1. This story is a quintessential "Mom Story." She does what any mom would do. What is her relationship with her son? Give three adjectives to describe how she relates to Him. What surprises you about their conversation?

2. In this story, there seems to be an underlying humor and bubbling joy. Give some of the evidence of the casual and unexpected beginning to Jesus' ministry. Is it possible that God the Father and Mary were grinning a little as Jesus begins His work?

3. What is Mary's response to Jesus' reluctance? She does not say any more words, but what does she do?

4. What else do we hear from Mary? She steps back so Jesus can step up. We will not see Mary again in the book of John until chapter 19 and the cross. What gave her that freedom?

5. How do you think her statement from Luke 1, "*Behold I am a handmaiden of the Lord...*" applies to this situation?

We have learned from the first three chapters of John that Jesus is the Creator, the Son of God the Father, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the One who has all authority and is sent from above, and the Bridegroom!

He is also the son of a woman named Mary who believed in Him and instructed the servants at a small wedding with the best advice ever given.

"Do whatever he tells you." –John 2:5

Echoing her words in Luke 1, "*Let it be to me according to your word,*" she obeys and instructs us to obey her Son as well.

