

Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

WEEK 5

The King Rejoices Over You



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Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

INTRODUCTION

SOAP METHOD

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:1-5

1. THE KING IS COMING
2. HIS FAITHFUL COVENANT
3. CROWNED WITH JOY
4. YOU ARE ALTOGETHER BEAUTIFUL
5. SACRED INTIMACY
6. WELCOMING HIS PRESENCE
7. DIVINE CELEBRATION

Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

This 7-day study passionately invites you into the glorious heart of God, where covenant love is not just sacred—it's a magnificent celebration! The King eagerly comes for His beloved with overwhelming joy, delight, and honor, symbolizing an unbreakable covenant bond that transcends time and circumstance. Each day passionately reveals how divine love leads not only to rescue but to a vibrant relationship—where God doesn't merely tolerate His people; He joyfully rejoices over them as a loving parent cherishes their child. You will deeply explore what it means to be known, chosen, and cherished, not as a servant, but as a beloved bride, embraced in the warmth of the King's affection. This union is richly marked by celebration, profound intimacy, and the mutual delight that love brings forth, creating a sacred space where hearts intertwine and souls flourish. As you journey through each day, expect to be transformed in your understanding of love, learning that it is not merely an emotion but a passionate commitment that binds us eternally to our Creator. The dynamic relationship we cultivate with Him opens up pathways to deeper joy, trust, and connection that you never thought possible.

Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

How to use this Journal:

There are many study methods out there! I encourage you to search through them and find what motivates and encourages you the most. I like to use the S.O.A.P Method.

Scripture

Write out a verse or passage of scripture.

Observation

What stood out to you about this verse or scriptures?

Where there any commands or instructions?

Application

How can you apply this today to your life today?

How can you live in light of this truth?

Prayer

Write out a prayer. Ask the Lord to show you how to meditate and apply this truth to your life.

Other areas to consider:

- * Author
- * Audience
- * Major Concept
- * Theme
- * Event
- * Keywords and Definitions
- * People
- * Places
- * When
- * Where
- * Who am I in this Verse?
- * Where is God?
- * What Is God Speaking?

Give yourself room to ponder and pray. Allow yourself time to listen for God to speak to you. Get creative! Draw, paint, make diagrams, whatever ignites your awe and wonder to studying God's Word!

Visit It Starts Small for more examples and in-depth study guide ideas!

www.itstartssmall.com

Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

Notes:

Narrator

⁶ *Who is this coming up from the wilderness
like columns of smoke,
scented with myrrh and frankincense
from every fragrant powder of the merchant?*

⁷ *Look! Solomon's bed
surrounded by sixty warriors
from the mighty men of Israel.*

⁸ *All of them are skilled with swords
and trained in warfare.
Each has his sword at his side
to guard against the terror of the night.*

⁹ *King Solomon made a carriage for himself
with wood from Lebanon.*

¹⁰ *He made its posts of silver,
its back of gold,
and its seat of purple.
Its interior is inlaid with love
by the young women of Jerusalem.*

¹¹ *Go out, young women of Zion,
and gaze at King Solomon,
wearing the crown his mother placed on him
on the day of his wedding—
the day of his heart's rejoicing.*

Man

Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

Notes:

4 *How beautiful you are, my darling.
How very beautiful!
Behind your veil,
your eyes are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down Mount Gilead.*

² *Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn sheep
coming up from washing,
each one bearing twins,
and none has lost its young.*

³ *Your lips are like a scarlet cord,
and your mouth is lovely.
Behind your veil,
your brow is like a slice of pomegranate.*

⁴ *Your neck is like the tower of David,
constructed in layers.
A thousand shields are hung on it—
all of them shields of warriors.*

⁵ *Your breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies.*

⁶ *Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
I will make my way to the mountain of myrrh
and the hill of frankincense.*

⁷ *You are absolutely beautiful, my darling;
there is no imperfection in you.*

⁸ *Come with me from Lebanon, my bride;
come with me from Lebanon!
Descend from the peak of Amana,
from the summit of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of the lions,
from the mountains of the leopards.*

Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

Notes:

⁹ *You have captured my heart, my sister, my bride.
You have captured my heart with one glance of your
eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.*

¹⁰ *How delightful your caresses are, my sister, my
bride.
Your caresses are much better than wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume than any balsam.*

¹¹ *Your lips drip sweetness like the honeycomb, my
bride.
Honey and milk are under your tongue.
The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance
of Lebanon.*

¹² *My sister, my bride, you are a locked garden—
a locked garden and a sealed spring.*

¹³ *Your branches are a paradise of pomegranates
with choicest fruits;
henna with nard,*

¹⁴ *nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
with all the trees of frankincense,
myrrh and aloes,
with all the best spices.*

¹⁵ *You are a garden spring,
a well of flowing water
streaming from Lebanon.*

Woman

¹⁶ *Awaken, north wind;
come, south wind.
Blow on my garden,
and spread the fragrance of its spices.*

Song of Solomon

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

Notes:

*Let my love come to his garden
and eat its choicest fruits.*

Man

*5 I have come to my garden—my sister, my bride.
I gather my myrrh with my spices.
I eat my honeycomb with my honey.
I drink my wine with my milk.*

Songs 3:6-5:1

The King is Coming

Song of Solomon 3:6

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The King is Coming

*⁶ Who is this coming up from the wilderness
like columns of smoke,
scented with myrrh and frankincense
from every fragrant powder of the merchant?
Songs 3:6*

The bride gazes in awe as her Beloved approaches—not with silence, but with a magnificent presence that commands attention. He emerges from the wilderness like a grand procession of incense, enveloping the air in a heady cloud of fragrance and enigma. The Groom is boldly visible—He is on a quest, a fragrant and purposeful advance that resonates with the essence of divine love. Christ approaches His bride with unwavering intention and regal majesty. Just like the king in this passage, Jesus never lingers passively; He seeks us fervently, draws near, and brings with Him the heavenly perfume of grace and love. His movement towards us radiates authority, intertwined with deep affection that stirs the soul.

*¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”
Luke 19:10*

This passage in Luke passionately resonates with the divine pursuit. Jesus came to seek and save—not merely to sit enthroned in heaven but to plunge into the wilderness of our brokenness. The King arrives not to conquer with violence but to redeem with boundless love. Theologically, this verse powerfully affirms the incarnation—God stepping into our wilderness with fierce compassion. The bride does not beckon the King to herself; she eagerly watches Him draw near. This is the very essence of grace: God makes the first move, igniting a transformative encounter.

Psychologically, being pursued by love answers one of the deepest longings of the human heart: the fervent desire to be wanted. Many carry the scars of abandonment or rejection, yet the Gospel sings a different anthem: You are not forgotten. You are passionately pursued. Neuroscience echoes this profound truth. When someone feels genuinely desired and cherished, the brain's attachment system springs to life, cultivating trust and a sense of safety. Christ's relentless pursuit reshapes our nervous systems - guiding us from fear to tranquility, from the shadows of shame to the radiant embrace of secure love.

You are not an afterthought. You are not a mere face in the crowd. The King is approaching—fragrant, radiant, and utterly unstoppable. His presence draws near with a sense of anticipation and hope, stirring hearts and awakening spirits. And He is coming for you with unfathomable love and purpose, ready to embrace you in a divine relationship that transcends all understanding. This is a moment of destiny, where the ordinary transforms into the extraordinary, and you are called to step into the light of His glory and grace!

Journal Prompt:

- Do you live as someone pursued by God?
- How would your relationship with Him change if you fully believed He seeks you every day?

Practical Steps and Application:

1. Reflect on times when God has clearly pursued you - through people, events, or inner promptings.
2. Read Luke 15. Where are you in the story?

Deeper Introspection:

¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."
Luke 19:10

Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost," is Jesus' mission statement, delivered after his transformative encounter with the tax collector Zacchaeus. The following journal prompts explore this powerful verse with extra-biblical references and real-world examples to encourage deep reflection.

Prompts on the nature of being "lost"

The concept of being "lost" is a central theme in Jesus' ministry. It extends beyond simply not being a believer to describe a state of spiritual alienation and brokenness.

- **Reflect on your own "Zacchaeus moment."** Jesus actively sought out the despised chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, climbing a tree to see him. Think of a

time when you were in a figurative "tree"—isolated, hiding, or feeling unworthy—and Jesus reached out to you. What did that moment of being "seen" feel like?

- **Consider the nature of sin and loss.** The Christian counselor Steve Brown uses the analogy of a Michelangelo sculpture: "It lacks only one thing...life.". In what areas of your life are you functioning perfectly but without spiritual "life"? Journal about your own "dead places" and how they might be revived by Jesus.
- **Write about the "lost" in your own life.** Jesus' parables of the lost sheep and lost coin emphasize the great value of each individual soul. Identify someone in your life whom you consider "lost." What assumptions do you make about their spiritual state? How can you begin to see and value them as Jesus does, rather than judging them?

Prompts on Jesus' active pursuit

Unlike the common human expectation that the lost should seek out the divine, Jesus demonstrates that God is the one who actively pursues us.

- **Journal about being pursued by God.** C.S. Lewis famously described himself as "the most reluctant convert in all of England," feeling like a mouse being relentlessly pursued by a cat. Reflect on your own experience. Has God's presence or truth felt like a pursuit in your life? How have you reacted to this divine pressure?
- **Ponder the power of an invitation.** Jesus didn't just see Zacchaeus; he personally invited himself to Zacchaeus' home. Consider a time when a personal invitation radically changed your life for the better. What does Jesus' invitation to dinner with a "sinner" reveal about his mission?
- **Extra-biblical example:** The Old Testament story of King David seeking out Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:5) is a foreshadowing of Jesus seeking the lost. Despite Mephibosheth being a cripple and from an enemy lineage, David actively pursues him, finds him, and restores him to his table. Reflect on this example. What does it teach you about God's relentless and restoring love for the marginalized?

Prompts on transformation and salvation

The encounter with Jesus is not merely about being found but about being saved, which leads to radical transformation. Zacchaeus' immediate, tangible repentance serves as the primary example for this.

- **Examine your fruits of repentance.** Zacchaeus's repentance was not just a prayer; it was a public action that included giving half his goods to the poor and repaying those he cheated. What would your "Zacchaeus moment" look like in a practical, day-to-day sense? What tangible actions would demonstrate your transformed life?
- **Write about the joy of being found.** When Zacchaeus is found and saved, Jesus declares, "Today salvation has come to this house". The joy is not just Zacchaeus'; the parables in Luke 15 confirm that all of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. Reflect on the joy you have personally experienced or witnessed from a person who has come to faith.

His Faithful Covenant

Song of Solomon 3:7-8

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His Faithful Covenant

⁷ Look! Solomon's bed
surrounded by sixty warriors
from the mighty men of Israel.
⁸ All of them are skilled with swords
and trained in warfare.
Each has his sword at his side
to guard against the terror of the night.
Songs 3:7-8

The imagery shifts dramatically: the Groom's procession boasts a magnificent chariot, fiercely protected by valiant warriors. Solomon's couch—his palanquin—remains shrouded in secrecy, safeguarded by sixty brave men, each one armed and ever watchful. The path of love, filled with both beauty and peril, is fiercely defended. This profound love is shielded with unwavering devotion. This scene powerfully illustrates the sanctity of covenant. The King arrives ready to guard what is holy and cherished. His approach to His bride is deliberate, strong, and impervious to harm. Likewise, Christ charges forth with a covenantal strength—not to compel love, but to preserve it with fierce passion.

³ But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you
from the evil one.
2 Thessalonians 3:3

Paul ardently reinforces this idea: "the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one." The love of Christ is not merely tender - it is an invincible shield. He does not simply draw near; He envelops us with His presence. He constructs formidable defenses and fights valiantly for the hearts of His people. Theologically, this illuminates the profound duality of God's love - both intimately nurturing and fiercely militant. His affection is far from weak; it is a powerful force. The covenant He forges with His bride stands unwavering, fortified by His righteousness, His blood, and His Word. His promise remains unshakeable because His character is steadfast and resolute.

Psychologically, this resonates deeply with our primal need for safety. True love simply cannot flourish in an environment rife with fear. When we wholeheartedly believe that God is safeguarding the very seeds of our identity and transformation, we can finally find peace. Neuroscience powerfully confirms that a sense of perceived safety liberates

our brains from the shackles of survival mode, allowing us to embrace relational openness. In Christ's protective presence, we can cease our relentless scanning for danger and begin to open our hearts fully to love. He wields the sword so we can truly rest as we journey forward.

You are never left defenseless; you stand strong and fortified in His presence. The King cherishes His beloved with an unwavering devotion, wrapping you in a divine embrace of grace, mercy, and truth that transcends all understanding. In moments of doubt and fear, His love acts as a shield, reinforcing your spirit and illuminating your path. He is a constant sentinel, ever vigilant and watchful over you, ensuring that no harm can touch you. His gentle whispers guide you through the darkest valleys, reminding you that you are never alone and that His sovereignty envelops you with protection and peace.

Journal Prompt:

- In what areas of your life do you struggle to feel spiritually protected?
- What would change if you believed Christ's covenant over you is guarded?

Practical Steps and Application:

1. Read Psalm 91.
2. Declare Psalm 91 over you this week.
3. Visualize Christ and His promises as a shield around your heart.
4. Choose one fear today and surrender it to God's faithful protection.

Deeper Introspection.

Read Psalm 91.

Here are journal prompts from Psalm 91, which is a powerful meditation on trust in God's protection. The prompts are supplemented with extra-biblical references and examples to help with reflection.

Prompts on dwelling in the shelter of the Most High (Psalm 91:1–2)

These verses speak of the intimacy and security that come from making God your dwelling place. It is a decision to be under his care rather than relying on worldly comforts.

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- **Prompt:** Psalm 91:1 says, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." In your life, where have you tried to find shelter outside of God's presence, only to be disappointed?
 - *Journal:* Write about a time you sought comfort in things like career success, relationships, or possessions and found them lacking. How did that experience challenge you to "dwell" differently?
 - **Prompt:** The imagery of abiding "under the shadow of the Almighty" is intimate and personal, like a mother bird protecting her young under her wings. Reflect on the names of God used here—*Most High* and *Almighty*.
 - *Journal:* How does the juxtaposition of God's immense power (Almighty) with his personal, gentle care (shadow) affect your view of him? Is it easier for you to see him as powerful or as a personal protector?
 - **Extra-biblical reflection:** Consider the example of Moses, who is believed by some to be the author of Psalm 91. As the leader of a nomadic people, he knew intimately what it meant to rely solely on God for shelter in the wilderness.
 - *Journal:* Like Moses, you may be in a "wilderness" period of uncertainty. How can you intentionally seek refuge in God rather than trying to build your own shelter?

Prompts on God's promises of protection (Psalm 91:3–13)

These verses describe specific threats—like pestilence, snares, and arrows—from which God promises deliverance for those who trust in him.

- **Prompt:** Psalm 91 promises protection from unseen dangers, like the "fowler's snare" and the "deadly pestilence". What modern-day fears can you associate with these?
 - *Journal:* Write about your fears concerning disease, financial ruin, or unseen digital threats. How does actively choosing to trust God's faithfulness (v. 4) change your response to these anxieties?
- **Prompt:** The verses about God commanding his angels to guard us (vv. 11–12) were famously used by Satan to tempt Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew

4:6). Jesus's response to Satan was not to test God but to stand on a proper understanding of his relationship with God.

- *Journal:* How might you be tempted to "test" God's protection by being careless or presumptuous in your life? In what ways does your faith call you to trust God's provision while also acting with wisdom?
- **Extra-biblical reflection:** Many soldiers and first responders have found courage in this psalm while in the midst of danger. Their witness reminds us that while protection is promised, it does not guarantee freedom from all harm in a broken world.
 - *Journal:* Reflect on how Psalm 91 offers sustaining grace and courage *in* trouble, rather than promising complete escape *from* trouble. How does this perspective reshape what you pray for in moments of crisis?

Prompts on the reciprocal love and knowledge (Psalm 91:14–16)

The psalm concludes with God speaking directly, outlining the blessings for those who cling to him in love.

- **Prompt:** God promises, "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him" (v. 14). The phrase "holds fast" implies a deep, affectionate attachment.
 - *Journal:* Consider the difference between simply following God's commands and holding fast to him out of love. What does clinging to God in love look like in your daily life? How can you cultivate a stronger attachment to him?
- **Prompt:** God says he will protect us "because he knows my name" (v. 14). This isn't just knowing the sound of the name but knowing his character and nature.
 - *Journal:* What is your understanding of God's character? What experiences have shaped your perception of him? Write a prayer of praise and petition, addressing God with the names that resonate most with his protective nature for you (e.g., Jehovah-Shalom, the Lord is my Peace).
- **Extra-biblical reflection:** The final promise of being shown God's "salvation" (v. 16) points toward the ultimate salvation provided by Jesus

Christ. Jesus's death and resurrection demonstrated God's ultimate deliverance from sin and death.

- *Journal:* What does Jesus's sacrifice teach you about the nature of God's protection? How is his victory over sin the ultimate fulfillment of the protection promised in this psalm?

Crowned with Joy

Song of Solomon 3:11

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Crowned with Joy

¹¹ *Go out, young women of Zion,
and gaze at King Solomon,
wearing the crown his mother placed on him
on the day of his wedding—
the day of his heart's rejoicing.*

Songs 3:11

The Groom arrives, and the air vibrates with anticipation. The procession culminates in a resounding celebration, while the onlookers are beckoned: "Step forward ... behold King Solomon!" He is crowned - not by warriors or dignitaries, but by His mother, a radiant symbol of nurturing love and generational blessing. And what a magnificent day it is - his wedding day! A day bursting with joy, covenant, and deep union. This is not just a moment; it's the joyous celebration of divine elation. The King transcends mere duty; He revels in the delight of this sacred union. The heart of God dances with joy on the day He joins with His people. This is the essence of the Gospel: Christ embraced the cross, not out of somber obligation, but for the radiant joy that lay ahead.

⁵ *For as a young man marries a young woman,
so your sons will marry you;
and as a groom rejoices over his bride,
so your God will rejoice over you.*

Isaiah 62:5

Isaiah takes this sentiment to thrilling heights: "as a groom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you!" This isn't mere poetic flourish—it's a profound prophetic reality. God revels in His people with a joy that mirrors a groom's exuberance on his wedding day. Theologically, this unveiling shows us that God's heart is not only holy—it bursts with happiness! His covenant with us is not a begrudging duty, but an effervescent celebration. His love is fierce and fiery, brimming with delight! Our union with Christ is a jubilant festivity, not a burdensome sentence.

Psychologically, joy stands as the most powerful form of affirmation. To know that we bring joy to someone we love profoundly reinforces our value. Many struggle not only with believing in God's love but even more with accepting that God genuinely likes them. Yet, scripture clearly reveals the truth: God doesn't just love you—He delights in

you! Neuroscience shows that when we are genuinely celebrated, especially by someone meaningful, our brains release dopamine—a chemical intertwined with pleasure, memory, and bonding. Joy deepens our connections and ignites our engagement!

Christ's joy radiates within us, igniting our ability to live with vibrant fullness and exhilarating freedom. You are the very heartbeat of Christ's joy, the essence of His love. The crown He adorns on the day of our union gleams with joy—and it is you who brings forth that radiant delight!

Journal Prompt:

- Do you believe you bring joy to the heart of God?
- How would your worship and self-worth change if you lived from that belief?

Practical Steps and Application:

1. Read Isaiah 62.
2. Write Isaiah 62 and replace all the "you" with your name.
3. Write a journal entry entitled: "God rejoices over me because..."
4. Choose to celebrate something today from your entry - no matter how small - as an act of joy in the Lord.

Deeper Introspection:

Read Isaiah 62.

Isaiah 62 is a prophetic poem about the future restoration and glory of Zion (Jerusalem) and, by extension, God's people. The chapter is full of passionate language, using metaphors of marriage and royal splendor to describe a coming transformation. For journal prompts, you can reflect on these themes and apply them to your personal life and relationship with God.

Prompts on the marriage metaphor (Isaiah 62:4–5)

These verses famously re-name Zion from "Forsaken" and "Desolate" to "My Delight is in Her" (Hephzibah) and "Married" (Beulah), reflecting God's restored, joyful, and intimate relationship with his people.

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- **Reflect on labels:** Like Zion, you may have carried negative self-labels—like "forsaken," "worthless," or "unloved"—based on past mistakes or rejections. Journal about the labels you have carried. How can you replace them with the "new name" God has for you, which is rooted in his delight?
 - **The marriage covenant:** Isaiah depicts God's covenant with his people as a marriage. How does this imagery affect your understanding of your relationship with God? In a marriage, vows are made and kept. In what ways have you strayed from your commitment to God, and how can you return to a place of covenantal intimacy and joy?
 - **Extra-biblical example:** The New Testament also uses the marriage metaphor to describe Christ's relationship with his church (Ephesians 5:25–27, Revelation 19:7). Reflect on this parallel. How does Christ's love and sacrifice serve as the ultimate model for the covenantal love Isaiah describes?

Prompts on the role of the watchmen (Isaiah 62:6–7)

The watchmen are appointed to pray tirelessly for Jerusalem's restoration. They "give him no rest" until God's promises are fulfilled, demonstrating the power of persistent, focused intercession.

- **Become a watchman:** God sets watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem and calls his people to be constant in prayer until his purposes are established. In your life, what are you prayerfully watching for? Identify a specific promise in Isaiah 62 that you want to pray for in your own life or community.
- **Give God no rest:** The command to "give him no rest" can seem bold or even presumptuous. How does this command challenge your typical prayer habits? Do you sometimes pray with a half-hearted or passive attitude? How can you pray with the kind of faith that persists and gives God no rest until his kingdom comes?
- **Extra-biblical example:** Consider the persistent widow in Luke 18:1–8, who was granted justice because of her persistent plea to the judge. How does Jesus's parable validate Isaiah's command to be relentless in prayer? What is a cause or person you feel called to pray for relentlessly?

Prompts on anticipation and preparation (Isaiah 62:10–12)

These final verses call for a "highway" to be prepared for God's redeemed people to return to Jerusalem. This signifies a time of urgency and preparation for the coming salvation.

- **Prepare the way:** The command to "build up the highway" and "clear away the stones" is a call to remove obstacles for those coming home. What "stones" or obstacles are preventing you or those in your community from fully entering into God's presence?
- **Embrace your redeemed identity:** At the end of the chapter, the people are called "The Holy People," "The Redeemed of the LORD," and "Sought Out". How can embracing this identity change how you see yourself? Journal about what it would look like to live out this redeemed identity each day.
- **Extra-biblical example:** This imagery of preparing the way was fulfilled in a new way with John the Baptist, who came to "prepare the way of the Lord" for Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:3). Just as the Israelites were called to prepare for their earthly return, Christians are called to prepare for Christ's return. In what ways can you prepare your heart and life for his coming?

You are all together Beautiful Song of Solomon 4:1

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You are all together Beautiful

4 How beautiful you are, my darling.

How very beautiful!

*Behind your veil,
your eyes are doves.*

*Your hair is like a flock of goats
streaming down Mount Gilead.*

Songs 4:1

The Groom launches into an impassioned and lyrical tribute to the bride's breathtaking beauty - each line a fervent celebration of her unique features, her vibrant spirit, her very essence. These are not mere surface-level compliments but profound expressions of deep intimacy and understanding. When he breathlessly declares, "How beautiful you are," he repeats it, as if completely engulfed by the depths of his love. "Your eyes are doves" conveys innocence, purity, and unwavering focus - mesmerizing eyes that do not stray, eyes filled with a serene tranquility.

This is how Christ views His bride, the church. He gazes upon us with the passionate eyes of covenant love, not through the lens of human merit. He intimately understands our imperfections yet boldly proclaims our identity in Him. His love is not merely blind—it is profoundly redemptive. When Jesus renamed Simon as Peter, He wasn't merely describing who Simon was in that moment, but who he would ultimately become. Christ calls us beautiful, not because we are without flaw, but because we belong to Him. Theologically, this transformative encounter resonates with the very essence of divine grace. God takes the initiative in love. He affirms us before we ever achieve. He speaks of destinies long before we feel deserving. His declarations are not wishful thinking—they are life-altering truths that forge our spiritual reality. Just as the Potter sees the vessel of clay, God perceives us in our process and loves us as whole and complete.

Psychologically, being seen and called by names filled with love is the very essence of our identity! When someone we cherish and respect affirms us, especially in our moments of deepest unworthiness, it ignites a profound healing within us. Repeated affirmations from a secure source not only build resilience but also nurture a vibrant self-esteem. Neuroscience backs this up: when we receive words of love and safety, our brains forge new neural connections that obliterate the patterns of shame, fear, and insecurity! The voice we trust the most becomes the powerful force that shapes us. God's voice is unwavering, gentle, and life-giving, feeding our souls and lighting our paths!

This is precisely why it is essential for us to allow God's Word to shape our identity more than our past, our mistakes, or the clamor of the world around us. His declaration – "You are altogether beautiful" – is not just poetic embellishment; it is divine revelation! It is a compelling call to embrace and see ourselves through His loving gaze.

Journal Prompt:

- What names or labels have shaped how you view yourself?
- Which of those come from God, and which need to be surrendered to Him?

Practical Steps and Application:

1. Read Songs 4:1-7 and image Jesus speaking those words over you.
2. Write five truths from scripture that affirm your identity in Christ.
3. Speak them daily. When self-critical thoughts arise, pause and replace them with the truths from God's Word.

Deeper Introspection:

Read 1 John 4:19.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.
1 John 4:19

The statement "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19) is a powerful summary of Christian ethics, revealing that our capacity to love is not a human achievement but a divine gift. The following prompts explore the implications of this verse, drawing from various Christian and philosophical traditions to deepen your reflection.

Prompts on receiving God's initial love

The second part of the verse, "he first loved us," establishes God as the initiator of love. Our love is a response, not an action that earns us favor.

- **Reflect on the nature of unconditional love.** The theologian Adam Clarke wrote, "His is the fountain love, ours but the stream". Reflect on the moments in your life when you have felt this overflowing "fountain love"—whether

through an answered prayer, a surprising moment of grace, or simply in the beauty of creation.

- **Acknowledge your own unlovability.** The preacher Charles Spurgeon highlighted that Christ loved us "when we were still sinners" and when we were at our worst. Journal about a time you were acutely aware of your failings, yet felt God's love. How does this experience contrast with the transactional nature of human relationships, where love is often conditional?
- **Extra-biblical reflection:** Consider the parent-child relationship. The love a parent has for their child is often unconditional and a powerful, though imperfect, reflection of God's love. Journal about a time you experienced or gave this kind of profound, foundational love. How did it change your understanding of security and identity?

Prompts on responding with love

The first half of the verse, "We love because he first loved us," links God's love for us to our ability to love in return. This response involves both our love for God and our love for others (1 John 4:20–21).

- **Move from obligation to overflow.** John Wesley, after his "strangely warmed" heart experience in London, began to love and pray even for those who had persecuted him. He moved from a dutiful religious obedience to a love that overflowed naturally from a heart transformed by grace. Journal about a relationship in your life where you've moved from loving out of obligation to loving out of an inner sense of grace and overflow.
- **Confront your unloving acts.** The author of 1 John connects loving God with loving others, calling anyone who claims to love God but hates a fellow believer a liar (1 John 4:20). Identify a relationship where you struggle to show love. How might contemplating God's initial love for you—even your most flawed parts—help you extend grace to this person?
- **Extra-biblical reflection:** The novelist C.S. Lewis argued that God's love is a "much safer thing to think about than our love for him" because our feelings "come and go," but God's love does not. Journal about the times your feelings toward God have been fickle. How can meditating on the constancy of God's love help stabilize and deepen your own, often-shifting, love for him?

Prompts on love as a transformative force

Receiving and responding to God's love is not a one-time event but a continuous process that changes us and the world around us.

- **Witness the power of love in your life.** When God's love is poured into your heart, it should be noticeable both in your relationship with him and in your relationships with others (1 John 4:20–21). Consider your own spiritual growth. What are the tangible "fruits" of love that have become evident in your life as you've matured in your faith?
- **Consider the source of your identity.** Christian author and activist Bob Goff writes extensively on love as an action, calling people to be "loved people who love people." Journal about where you derive your sense of worth. Do you try to earn your value through what you do, or do you live from the security of being someone who is already deeply loved by God?
- **Extra-biblical reflection:** In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, the bishop Myriel shows profound, unconditional love to the ex-convict Jean Valjean, who responds by giving up his life of crime to become a compassionate, honorable man. Reflect on how this fictional act of grace mirrors God's love. Is there someone in your life who has shown you unconditional love that led to your own transformation? Write about the ripple effect of that one person's love.

Sacred Intimacy

Song of Solomon 4:12

S

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Sacred Intimacy

¹² *My sister, my bride, you are a locked garden—
a locked garden and a sealed spring.*
Songs 4:12

This enchanting moment paints the bride as a garden enclosed — a sanctuary bursting with fragrance, brimming with fruitfulness, and alive with a treasure that is cherished, sheltered, and distinctly her own. To the contemporary listener, it might seem confining, yet within the lexicon of love lies an ardent truth: the language of sacred intimacy. She is not cloaked in shame, but rather cloaked in honor, an exquisite reserve rather than a rejection. Her worth does not lie in mere exposure, but in the profound depths of her belonging. Spiritually, this vivid imagery encapsulates the beautiful mystery of a believer's life in Christ.

³ *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*
Colossians 3:3

Paul passionately reveals that our lives are profoundly hidden with Christ in God. Our intimacy with Jesus is not designed for public performance but rather for a deeply private communion. We are God's cherished secret place, His secluded garden, where love thrives in the safety of His presence. Theologically, this speaks of holiness—not as a cold separation, but as a joyful consecration. God does not set us apart to isolate us; instead, He prepares us for a deeper, more intimate union. The bride, like the church, is beautifully enclosed to grow. She is lovingly protected to flourish. This encapsulates the beauty of covenant: to be completely known and wholeheartedly kept.

Psychologically, humans **thrive** when they feel **deeply** safe and secure in love. Intimacy demands healthy boundaries. We are not meant to be fully known by everyone — but we can be **totally** known by God. By cultivating emotional and spiritual "gardens" in our lives, we open ourselves to grow **freely**, to process our feelings without fear, and to discover healing without judgment. Neuroscience illuminates this truth: a secure, non-judgmental relational environment is essential for profound emotional transformation. When our brains reside in a safe space — a sanctuary where they are shielded from threat — they can unlearn fear-based behaviors and embrace new patterns of peace and trust. God's presence, this healing space, is **always** available to us.

You are His cherished garden. Allow Him to stroll with you in the gentle cool of the day. Let Him bask in the intoxicating fragrance of your worship, your deepest thoughts, and your fully surrendered heart.

Journal Prompt:

- Do you live your spiritual life as something sacred and set apart - or public and pressured?
- Where can you cultivate more intimacy with God?

Practical Steps and Application:

1. Create a quiet space in your home dedicated to prayer and presence with God.
2. Reflect on what "being hidden with Christ" means to you in this season.
3. Say "no" to one distraction today and say "yes" to intimacy with Jesus.

Deeper Introspection:

Read Colossians 3:3.

³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
Colossians 3:3

The powerful statement in Colossians 3:3, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God," is central to the Christian understanding of identity and security. Here are journal prompts to reflect on this verse, with extra-biblical references and examples to help you explore its meaning.

Prompts on your death to a worldly identity

The verse begins with the declaration, "you died." This refers to a decisive break from your old, worldly identity when you came to Christ.

- **Reflect on your "old self."** The apostle Paul uses this imagery of dying to a former way of life to contrast it with the new life in Christ. Journal about the aspects of your life—habits, sins, or perspectives—that you feel have died with Christ. What did it cost you to let them go? What was the gain?

-
- **Contemplate the significance of baptism.** The early church used baptism to symbolize this death and resurrection. The convert was submerged, symbolizing being "buried with him," and then raised from the water to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Reflect on your baptism or the idea of it. In what ways do you need to be continually submerged and raised again to live in this new identity?
 - **Extra-biblical example:** Consider the myth of the phoenix, which is consumed by fire and then rises from the ashes as a new bird. While not Christian, this myth captures the idea of total, irreversible transformation that death brings. In what ways do you feel like you are still holding on to the ashes of your old self rather than embracing the full reality of your resurrection in Christ?

Prompts on the hiddenness of your new life

The phrase "your life is hidden with Christ in God" refers to the secret, spiritual, and secure nature of your true identity.

- **Ponder the contrast between the seen and the unseen.** The world often judges us by external, visible measures—success, appearance, and status. However, your truest life and identity are now hidden from the world. Journal about this dichotomy. When do you find yourself tempted to seek approval from the visible world, and how can you return to the truth of your hidden identity?
- **Meditate on your security.** Early church leaders like A.T. Robertson used the analogy of a burglar-proof vault to describe this security: "No hellish burglar can break that combination". Reflect on what this means for your life. What anxieties or fears can you let go of, knowing that your most precious possession—your life in Christ—is perfectly secure?
- **Extra-biblical example:** Think of a powerful spy or special operative in a story who lives a secret, hidden life, known only to a trusted few. Their true identity is what defines them, not the public persona they project. How can you, as a believer, live with the same quiet confidence, knowing that your true identity is hidden with Christ, even when you must navigate the complexities of this world?

Prompts on living from your new identity

This hidden identity is not meant to be passive. It is the fuel for a new way of living, which will be revealed in glory.

- **Align your mind with heaven.** Because you are hidden with Christ, your mind should be set on "things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Take time to journal about your daily thoughts and concerns. To what extent are they focused on things that are temporary and earthly versus things that are eternal and heavenly?
- **Anticipate the revelation of glory.** Colossians 3:4 promises that when "Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." The hiddenness is not permanent. Journal about what this future promise means to you. How does the knowledge of your future glory influence how you handle present trials or obscurity?
- **Extra-biblical example:** Consider the story of the Ugly Duckling. For a long time, the bird saw himself as something he was not—an ugly and awkward duck. But when his true identity as a swan was revealed, he was transformed. In what ways are you still living as an "ugly duckling," and how can you choose to live as a swan, embracing the true glory that is already yours in Christ?

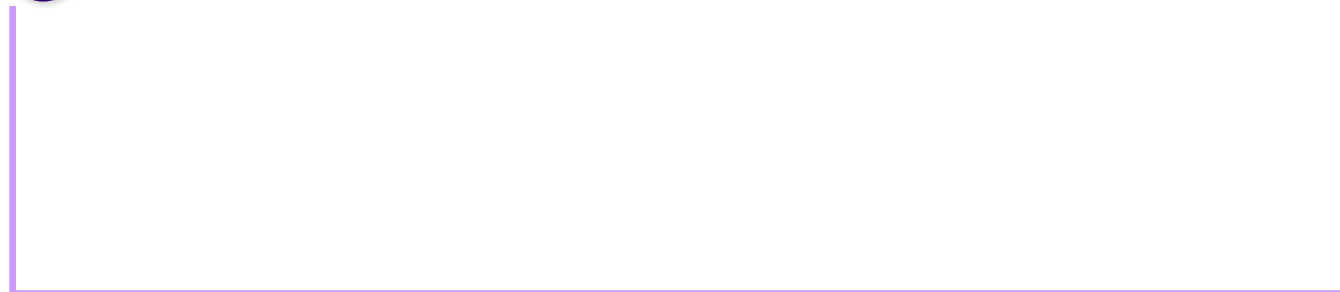
Welcoming His Presence

Song of Solomon 4:16

S



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Welcoming His Presence

¹⁶ Awaken, north wind;
come, south wind.
Blow on my garden,
and spread the fragrance of its spices.
Let my love come to his garden
and eat its choicest fruits.
Songs 4:16

Here the bride opens herself completely to the exhilarating movements of God. She beckons the brisk, disciplining north wind and the gentle, nurturing south wind. She longs for her garden—her soul—to release its fragrance. Her surrender is profound and unwavering. She is ready not only to receive but to give, to be lavishly poured out. This moment embodies the fullness of spiritual maturity. The believer no longer merely seeks God's comfort but fervently welcomes His transformative work. True surrender cries, "Whatever it takes, come, Lord!" The garden, once locked away, now stands ready for the winds to dance through. Not to destroy, but to awaken.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17

Theologically, the winds embody the fervent Spirit of God, sweeping through our lives in every season—sometimes tender, at other times with fierce power! We may not wield control over the wind, but we can embrace its presence with open hearts. This, dear friends, is the true essence of revival! Just as at Pentecost, the winds of God rush in, igniting transformation in every corner of existence. Yet, this glorious movement sparks to life only with deep hunger and heartfelt invitation!

Psychologically, this represents a powerful journey from guardedness to profound vulnerability. Embracing the discomfort of change opens the door to a deeper authenticity and unyielding courage. Vulnerability is not a sign of weakness; it's the fertile ground where transformation begins to flourish. Neuroscience passionately affirms this: when we release our grip on fear and allow ourselves to welcome healthy change, our brain's plasticity sparks remarkable growth. The winds of the Spirit do not destabilize us; rather,

they fortify our resilience. Each time we surrender to God's presence, we amplify our inner strength, transforming our very essence.

Let the wind blow with fervor! Embrace the Spirit's movement—invite Him not just in the soothing moments but also when it challenges you and stretches your limits. Your garden is primed to overflow with abundance!

Journal Prompt:

- Where are you resisting God's movement in your life?
- What kind of "wind" might He be sending now to stir something new?

Deeper Introspection:

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17.

*¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom.
2 Corinthians 3:17*

The freedom mentioned in this verse is not a worldly freedom to do whatever one pleases, but a spiritual liberation from the bondage of sin, guilt, and the law.

- **Reflect on the nature of true freedom.** Journal about how the world defines freedom (e.g., lack of restrictions, individual license) and how spiritual freedom differs. How has your own understanding of freedom changed since beginning your walk with Christ?
- **Identify areas of bondage.** The Spirit offers freedom from all kinds of spiritual chains—fear, addiction, legalism, and condemnation. Write about a specific area of your life where you feel bound. How can inviting the Holy Spirit to work in that area bring liberation?
- **Celebrate freedom from condemnation.** Paul contrasts the "ministry of death" under the old covenant with the "ministry of the Spirit" that gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6-9). Reflect on a time you felt condemned by past mistakes. How does the Spirit's freedom, which removes guilt and shame, replace that feeling with peace and purpose?

Prompts on transformation by the Spirit

The verse is followed by 2 Corinthians 3:18, which explains that as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into His image by the Spirit.

- **Ponder the contrast between veiled and unveiled glory.** In the context of 2 Corinthians 3, the veil over Moses's face in the Old Testament symbolized the temporary, fading glory of the old covenant. Write about how the Holy Spirit has "unveiled" your understanding of God's truth, helping you to see His glory more clearly.
- **Trace your journey of transformation.** Paul describes a process of being changed "from glory to glory". Reflect on your spiritual journey. What tangible evidence of spiritual growth can you point to? Acknowledge and celebrate the work the Holy Spirit has already done in your life.
- **Biblical example: Paul's conversion.** Paul's radical transformation on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–19) vividly demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit to change a person's life. Compare a former aspect of your life—a behavior, attitude, or thought pattern—to Paul's zealous persecution. How has the Spirit turned you in a new direction?

Prompts on living and serving in freedom

The freedom the Spirit brings is not for personal indulgence but for serving others in love.

- **Serve from a place of freedom, not duty.** As Galatians 5:13 says, we are "called to freedom... do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another". Journal about your motivations for serving. Is it out of a joyful overflow of freedom or a sense of obligation?
- **Pray for a heart like Christ's.** The ultimate result of the Spirit's work is to make us more like Jesus. Reflect on a Christ-like quality you want to develop, such as patience, compassion, or humility. Ask the Spirit to work in you to produce that fruit of righteousness (Galatians 5:22–23).
- **Biblical example: The early church's boldness.** After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to speak boldly about Jesus (Acts 4:31). Reflect on a time you needed boldness to share your faith or stand up for what is right. Ask the Spirit to give you that same kind of courage.

Divine Celebration

Song of Solomon 5:1

S

O

A

P



Divine Celebration

5 I have come to my garden—my sister, my bride.

I gather my myrrh with my spices.

I eat my honeycomb with my honey.

I drink my wine with my milk.

Narrator

Eat, friends!

Drink, be intoxicated with caresses!

Songs 5:1

The final verse in this exquisite sequence transcends mere poetry - it erupts as a bold proclamation! After the sacred consummation of love between the Groom and bride, the scene radiates outward with exuberance. "Eat, friends!" The Groom joyfully beckons, embodying a moment that is far from private; it is a glorious, shared feast! Love, in its richest essence, is never intended to be confined; it exuberantly overflows. This brilliant display mirrors the heart of the Gospel. Christ's union with the church is profoundly personal – yet it reaches out, universally redemptive. His joy over us is anything but selfish; it is a magnificent joy that passionately invites others to the table. Just as the father of the prodigal son threw an extravagant feast upon his son's return, so too does Christ rejoice not only in our return but fervently invites others to bask in that same boundless joy.

*⁷ Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory,
because the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has prepared herself.*

⁸ She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure.

For the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints.

⁹ Then he said to me, "Write: Blessed are those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb!" He also said to me, "These words of God are true."

Revelation 19:7-9

Theologically, this celebration passionately points forward to the ultimate union—the magnificent marriage supper of the Lamb depicted in Revelation 19. It vibrantly speaks to the profound reality of Christian community here and now. Communion, both the sacred sacrament and the beautiful shared life of believers, is a resounding declaration of joy in Jesus. It's a table where healing flows freely, where forgiveness is the rich wine that invigorates our souls, and love is the everlasting bread that never runs dry.

¹¹ *"I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and
your joy may be complete.
John 15:11*

In this vibrant vision, the church transforms from a mere witness to joy into an impassioned vessel brimming with it! A church that intimately knows Christ's love must boldly fling open its doors wide, overflowing with hospitality, compassion, and jubilant celebration!

Psychologically, shared joy is one of the most exhilarating and transformative experiences in the human condition. When we immerse ourselves in joy within a safe, loving community, it powerfully reinforces our sense of security, trust, and meaning. It whispers to our hearts: "You belong. You are cherished here." Neuroscience passionately confirms that these joyful connections ignite the brain's reward centers, flooding our systems with dopamine and oxytocin. These powerful neurochemicals not only create and deepen emotional bonds, but also enhance our physical connections. Constant shared joy weaves a vibrant tapestry of lasting relationships that fortify us against stress, depression, and the pangs of isolation.

In a world besieged by loneliness, overwork, and anxiety, a table of genuine celebration—deeply anchored in Christ—emerges as a powerful revolution. It is both healing and prophetic, a vivid reminder to the world that life transcends mere performance or suffering—there exists love, warmth, and boundless joy waiting to be embraced.

So today, don't simply be a guest at the banquet; rise up and become the host! Extend a heartfelt invitation to others, inviting them to taste and witness the goodness of the Lord! Allow your story, your healing, and your deep connection with God to flow abundantly. Celebration is not merely the conclusion of the journey—it is the vibrant fruit that springs forth from it. It is designed to multiply, to spread joy and inspiration far

and wide!

Journal Prompt:

- Where has God turned your mourning into Joy?
- Who in your life needs a place at the table?

Practical Steps and Application:

1. Plan a celebration of some kind this week or month - small or large- and center it on God's goodness.
2. Write a thank you note to someone who helped you experience joy during a hard season.
3. Read Revelation 19:7-9 and meditate on your place at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Deeper Introspection:

Read John 15:11.

*¹¹ "I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."
John 15:11*

John 15:11, "I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete," is a powerful verse that speaks to the connection between abiding in Christ, obeying his commands, and experiencing a full and complete joy. Here are some journal prompts to help you reflect on this passage.

Prompts on the source of joy

Jesus makes it clear that the ultimate source of joy is found in him and in abiding in his love and commands.

- **Reflect on the difference between happiness and joy.** The world often pursues fleeting happiness, which is dependent on external circumstances. Jesus offers a deeper, more enduring joy that is rooted in a relationship with him. Journal about a time when you experienced joy despite difficult circumstances. What was

the source of that joy, and how did your faith play a role in it?

- **Ponder the contrast between Jesus's joy and worldly desires.** C.S. Lewis famously said, "God finds our desires not too strong but too weak". Reflect on this idea in the context of joy. Where have you settled for lesser joys in life instead of pursuing the lasting joy found in Jesus?
- **Biblical example: The Joy of the Lord is Your Strength.** In Nehemiah 8:10, after the Israelites had heard the law read, they were commanded not to mourn or weep, "for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Reflect on how this biblical example connects to Jesus's words in John 15:11. How can drawing on the joy of the Lord be a source of strength for you today?

Prompts on the path to full joy

According to the context of John 15, the path to experiencing this full joy involves abiding in Christ and keeping his commandments.

- **Journal about the practice of "abiding."** The image of the vine and branches in John 15:1–8 illustrates what it means to abide in Christ. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must remain connected to the vine. Write about what "abiding" looks like in your life. What practical steps can you take to more intentionally let Jesus's words and presence dwell in you?
- **Connect obedience and joy.** Jesus says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:10). Reflect on the connection between obedience and joy. Is it hard for you to see obedience as a path to joy rather than a burden? Why or why not?
- **Biblical example: The wise man and the foolish man.** In Matthew 7:24–27, Jesus tells the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish man who built his on the sand. The wise man's house withstood the storm, symbolizing a life built on obedience to Jesus's teachings. Reflect on this parable. In what ways has obedience to Jesus's commands provided stability and joy in your life during a storm?

Prompts on the overflow of joy

The joy Jesus offers is not just for our own benefit; it is meant to overflow into our relationships and serve as a witness to the world.

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- **Reflect on joy as a testimony.** Jesus's disciples were eyewitnesses to his joy, even in the face of his impending crucifixion. Consider how the joy you experience in Christ can serve as a powerful witness to others. When have you seen someone else's joy in difficult circumstances and been impacted by it?
 - **Connect joy with loving others.** The command to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12) immediately follows Jesus's words about having full joy. Journal about this connection. How does experiencing the fullness of Jesus's joy empower you to love others more deeply and selflessly?
 - **Biblical example: The early church's witness.** The early church, as described in Acts 2:42–47, was marked by its joy and generosity, and as a result, "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Reflect on this example. What might your faith community look like if the members were overflowing with the full joy Jesus promises? What is one step you can take to help cultivate this kind of environment?



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