

Nothing to Prove

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DESCRIPTION

Too many of us walk through life feeling as if we don't measure up. We always seem to thirst for more. We think if we could only work harder or be better, we could be enough. But the truth is, we will never be enough. And thankfully, we don't have to be. In *Nothing to Prove*, Jennie Allen walks through the gospel of John demonstrating that only Jesus is enough. We don't have to prove anything because Jesus has already proven everything. In this 7-day reading plan, you'll explore topics such as God's triumph over death, faith in His daily guidance, and how to grow in intimacy with Christ. Discover how our thirsty hearts can only be quenched by the Living Water.

DAY 1

Bible Verses:

Matthew 11:28-30

John 7:37-38

Devotional

This may hurt initially. You are not enough.

We aren't. None of us. It's a universal diagnosis. But after we absorb the initial shock and hurt of that truth, it's usually followed by a wave of relief. We understand there is a reason we all feel a deep-in-our-bones problem. Then and only then can we allow Jesus to meet our enormous need.

I am so full of hope. Though we've been looking in all the wrong places for freedom, the door to true freedom is now found in a difficult diagnosis. It's a door to the most tender, kind, freeing, full hope.

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on trying to measure up? Trying to prove yourself?

Maybe we are doing this life all wrong.

What if instead of living insecurely, you were watching God move through you in ways you couldn't believe?

What if instead of living in fear, you lived seeing potential?

Jesus has a plan for our emptiness, our fatigue, our inadequacies, our sin.

Jesus is saying, Keep coming back to Me and I will keep satisfying you.

And out of that life with Me, you will overflow and bring life to others.

We are here because it seems everything in us is fighting to keep us from getting to the water we are so thirsty for. I see it in your eyes when we sit and talk about how you are really, actually doing. War. We hesitate to use the word because it sounds dramatic. But you feel it.

We want to think the war is out there, out there on the Internet, out there on the news, out there in other countries, out there in everyone else. So we say, "I'm okay." We think that and say that and try to mean it.

But the fight is always right here with us. So many of us stay thirsty, even though cold, living springs of water are right over the hill, completely available to us. Pretending to be at peace never ended a war. Engaging. Fighting. Coming together for great purposes. That is what ends wars.

We must remind ourselves from Scripture who we are in Christ. Jesus is enough, so we don't have to be. In fact, it is downright arrogant to keep trying to be.

I don't have to prove anything because Jesus proved everything.

Respond

What consumes most of your thoughts? Why?

What consumes most of your time? Why?

How are you and Jesus right now?

DAY 2

Bible Verses:

John 2:1-12

John 10:7-11

Devotional

Until we regularly enjoy the rhythms of grace Jesus is promising, we tend to wear out from striving. We move from our own futile effort to becoming numb.

We were built to crave pleasure, joy, happiness. God built us for it, and when we don't find it in Him and come to the end of ourselves, we look for something to numb our reality.

As a culture, our God-given craving for fulfillment has driven us past God Himself, who was meant to be the fulfillment of our desires, toward a drug that helps us cope with our discontentment and inadequacies: entertainment. As a generation, we are addicted to it. We have a constant need to occupy our minds and time with diversions and amusements. For some, that may be alcohol and for others exercise. For some, it may be sports for their kids or vacations or gossip. It could mean chasing a job that is more challenging or a marriage that seems more exciting. Some even seek that diversion in meaningful work or charity, even religious activity. Some seek it by refreshing Facebook and some through the rush of pornography.

But just like the metaphorical cheap wine, these pursuits never satisfy us.

These are the drugs of the day, and, friends, we are all wasting our lives on them. But what is the exchange? If we lay down the drug of our day which diverts us from God and actual wonder, delight, and joy, what are we to pick up? Look ahead at a moment when Jesus is speaking of this war for us—the war for our minds, our salvation, our well-being. Jesus describes Himself as the shepherd and us as His sheep.

Respond

In John 10, what do you think Jesus is after? What is the thief after?

What is the only door to the abundant life we were built for?

How do these verses affect your view of Jesus' desires for your life now?

DAY 3

Bible Verses:

John 4:1-43

Devotional

The New York Times recently posted an article entitled "To Fall in Love with Anyone, Do This." Like everyone else who read the title, I had to know what "this" was that could cause any two random people to fall in love. The article was based on a study conducted by Dr. Arthur Aron, who successfully caused two complete strangers to fall in love.

The two strangers sat across from one another and asked a series of 36 questions that gradually increased in intimacy, moving from questions like #2, "Would you like to be famous?" to #30, "When did you last cry in front of another person?"

At the end of the 36 questions, the two strangers were to stare into each other's eyes for four minutes.

Have you ever tried to stare into someone's eyes for four whole minutes?

It is no small thing to stare into someone's soul for four minutes and all the while allow them to stare into yours. I think the risk usually proves too much. Most people look away. Connection is like that. Most people move away from it when it comes too close.

Connection costs our whole selves.

Connection risks all that we are.

And yet we still all crave connection more than just about anything else on earth.

I venture to say most of us feel a constant twinge of loneliness. Even though we are surrounded by people, we can still miss each other. We can be sitting in the same room or driving in a car together and miss opportunities to really see each other, to really hear each other. And we move on just like this, missing Jesus, too.

How badly do you want to live more connected?

Jesus was so present in His life here. He chose to have intentional conversations with those around Him, but also chose to steal away and pursue time with His Father. He was God the Son, and yet there was no greater priority than time with His Father. Jesus' intimate relationship with the Father and obedience to Him defined and directed everything Jesus did while on earth. He clearly says in John 4, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (v. 34).

What what it might look like for us to live with the same devotion?

Respond

How did Jesus begin the conversation with the woman at the well? Why might this be important?

What barriers did they press through to carry on this conversation?

What convicts you most from this passage?

DAY 4

Bible Verses:

John 6

Devotional Content

Every section of this chapter reveals aspects of what it means to rest. When Jesus promises us rest, he is almost always talking about soul rest. It's why all the ways we try to rest our souls don't actually make us feel very rested—TV, sleep, Facebook surfing, and so forth. They all fall short because nothing but Jesus can issue rest for our chaotic insides.

In fact, most of the ways we try and rest actually make our insides more chaotic. Surfing Facebook can end with us angry over someone's post or comparing our lives to our friends'. Binge-watching a show can suck us into fictional stress and distract us from connecting with our real-life people. Even taking a vacation can become chaotic with plans and preparation and possibly disappointed expectations.

In John 6:5-7 we see Jesus state the impossible task before Philip, testing him. It seems Jesus went out of His way to show Philip and the rest of the disciples it could not be done in their power.

Then with shocking ease and out of a place of relationship and trust with His Father, Jesus modeled for them and us the freedom from striving and the joy of dependence.

Jesus fully trusted in the exceeding abundance of His Father, God. Do we?

Philip believed there wasn't enough. Philip believed they were in this with only their own resources. But Andrew had at least enough faith to bring Jesus whatever they had, even though it was insufficient.

And then, almost to drive home the point even further, in the chaos of a storm, Jesus walks on water to His men. He could have gotten on the boat before it left the shore, but then they would have missed His overwhelming power over all of the chaos. We may feel crushed by the fear of real circumstances, but Jesus is above the circumstances. He moves through chaos as if it doesn't exist, because in light of eternity and His unending resources and power, our chaos here is a small storm that Jesus walks right through with us.

Jesus is the living, unending water and the Bread of life when all other breads run out. He keeps giving in abundance. Our soul rest is not based on the absence of trouble and chaos. Our soul rest is based on the never-failing character of our good, capable, rich Father God.

Respond

Take a minute to lay out your fears. What are you afraid of?

What are you worried about?

How can you move from fear and striving to trust and resting?

DAY 5

Bible Verses:

Matthew 13:44

John 9

Devotional

What if I told you that to really be free, to enjoy God, to fulfill your purpose here on earth you must willingly RISK for the glory of God?

Would you search for a text that supports that supposition? Fair.

Matthew 13 is one of many passages that does so.

Jesus said that one who enters the kingdom is like a man who found treasure in a field. The man believed the treasure was worth selling everything he owned. He believed the reward was worth the risk. It took guts to make that call.

It took guts for the blind man to wander down to the water believing what Jesus said would work.

It took guts for Jesus to ignore man-made religious laws to pursue the freedom and healing of one.

It takes guts for us to leave the lies and chains and sin and believe there is something better, something worth losing everything here to obtain.

Jesus pressed people.

He continually pressed them out of their comfortable lives, cultural expectations, predictable scenarios into freedom, healing, fullness, abundance, joy.

That's the way the Spirit moves.

That's the life God is calling us to.

Can you imagine the hope this life-long blind man had to risk to walk down to the water and wash his eyes? Imagine what he thought to himself as he walked.

Can you imagine the respect and approval Jesus was risking as He chose to heal the blind man on the Sabbath? He would potentially be shut down as a religious leader. He risked being considered by some now as a sinner. He risked the judgment of not only those who hated Him but potentially those who were following Him.

Of course, Jesus risked very intentionally, and He knew it was worth it.

Respond

What do you think it would have been like to be blind from birth during this time?

How would his life change now that he could see?

How did the man respond to Jesus when Jesus found him? Who did the man believe Jesus to be?

DAY 6

Bible Verses:

Matthew 13:44

John 11

Devotional

We don't want to get sick. We don't want to feel alone. We don't want to be hungry. We don't even want to eat bad food so we pick a favorite place. Is it wrong to act this way? Actually no, it isn't wrong. It's just human. In fact it isn't only humans; even most animals are built with the same primary goals, to avoid pain, suffering, and danger.

It is best to understand our resistance.

I believe everything Jesus does and says and allows to transpire is for our good and for His glory.

Jesus takes everyone in the John 11 story deep into the dark grave of pain and suffering. He doesn't stop a death of a dearly loved friend, and He doesn't spare those He loves days of agonizing grief and suffering. He could have prevented this entire ordeal, yet He allows it to unfold.

Why? John shared the purpose clearly in verses 4 and 14: For our faith and for His glory.

It's obvious Jesus hates death in this passage, and He hates watching those He loves suffer. I spent a bit of time considering (as you probably have also) exactly why Jesus cried. He knew what would happen moments later. You'd think He'd be excited to exercise His power over death and to see His friend.

But He paused and grieved with Mary.

There is no way to know all that Jesus was feeling in those moments. But one thing He must have felt was compassion for all that Mary and Martha and all the other humans around Him, whom He deeply loved, couldn't yet see or understand.

Perhaps Jesus cried with Mary because, for a moment, He considered what it must be like to stumble in fear in the dark, to not have a clear hope and picture of heaven, and to despair at death. Perhaps it troubled Him because Mary's eyes could not yet see what is waiting for those who believe.

Jesus knew all that God had prepared, yet He was not going to reveal it on that day. While He might temporarily suspend this day's pain and grief, He knew that suffering and pain remain a part of the human equation. But He was determined to give them the one thing that could transport them to all that was waiting for them: Faith.

Is it conceivable that God may allow temporary suffering to expand our faith? Absolutely. Our faith, tried and tested, will lead us to our eternal home where pain and suffering will never touch us again.

But what if the very thing that God is allowing for our good, our faith, our hope, our perseverance, we keep pushing away and avoiding?

We can either move into the suffering within us and around us or we can try to avoid it. But if we choose avoidance, not only will we miss the hard parts but we will miss the best parts, too.

Respond

What were two different ways the people responded to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead?

By healing Lazarus, Jesus knew this would trigger the Pharisees' plot to kill him. He was headed to the cross. How does this impact the way we read the story in John 11?

What are some of your greatest disappointments? Can you see the presence and purpose of Jesus in those moments? Where? How?

DAY 7

Bible Verses:

John 21

Devotional

We began this journey with great hopes of experiencing lives more awakened, more full, more focused, more connected, more present, more joy-filled. I have journeyed with you and I can honestly say I feel all of that. This journey into Jesus' life and words has changed me.

It wasn't the journey I had planned when I began. It was better and messier and more difficult. But isn't that how it goes?

One of my dear friends has brought my family dinner once a week for the past several weeks because she feels this is what God wants her to do right now. We aren't sick. We're not walking through a difficult time. So of course I panic and resist every time. I hate to receive. I feel so undeserving. But when I resist my friend says, "This isn't about you. This is me obeying God, Jennie. So, tough."

What I haven't told her for all of these weeks is that I cry every time she brings me food. It feels like the kindest gift to me. It just feels like God's surprising, beautiful, extravagant love to me. What if we all just did the thing God put in us to do every day? If that happened, I have a feeling we could end up making the whole world feel the surprising, beautiful, extravagant love of our God. There are an awful lot of us. Perhaps we could at least make a dent.

I believe that is what this journey was. And I didn't see it coming.

It has been God showing me over and over that His love is unending and extravagant. He isn't waiting for me to achieve; He is waiting for me to receive.

He desperately wants me to feel loved and to move and breathe and connect and love out of that love. We are about to see how Jesus creatively connected to His men just before He completed His work on earth. He didn't require perfection or striving. He just issued them beautiful rhythms of grace that caused them to rest and enjoy God. Then, their obedience flowed out of a relationship, out of being loved.

Respond

In John 21, what was different after Jesus appeared?

Describe Peter's response to seeing Jesus. Why do you think Peter responded this way?

What do you think Jesus wanted from them in that moment? What do you think he wants from you in this moment?