



DEVOTIONAL SERIES

The Heart of the Matter

Summer 2024

DAY #1

Flowing Waters By Leanna Simpson

JOHN 7:38

Jesus says, "Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'"

Every day, our "hearts" are on display by our thoughts, words, action, and investment of time. Out of our hearts flows actions, words, and relationships that seem to be in stark contrast to what we want. We want to be loved. So why do we never seem to find or show the love that we seek?

Listen as we share Nicole's story:

Growing up, Nicole's childhood was marked by emotional neglect and a profound sense of invisibility. She was parented with shame and left feeling unsupported and unvalued. Her mother failed to provide the love, consistency, and care Nicole desperately needed and wanted.

As Nicole became a mother herself, she found herself repeating the patterns modeled by her mother. She entered an abusive and co-dependent relationship. This relationship led to depression and suicidal thoughts. She felt trapped and alone. Her heart desired love, but she never seemed to find the love she needed and was unable to give her children the love that they needed, too.

Does this story resonate with you? Life and love, relationships and generational choices,

an unquenchable desire to find identity and acceptance in the pit of our soul... this is the heart of each one of us.

The reality of our life is that we are kept alive through the pumping of blood by our heart. In the same way, our heart's desire is to be fully loved and accepted by another.

This is the truth. The problem is that we are never able to find this love or give this love as a human being because the love we seek is perfect and unconditional. We are not perfect and the love we can offer is not unconditional.

BUT this kind of love can be found. Our desire to be loved unconditionally and perfectly can be met by the One who created and knows us fully. He is perfect and His love never fails.

Today, your heart can begin to beat for the first time. Turn to Him, my friend. He is waiting.

Additional Scriptures: Romans 10: 8-13

Worship Song: No Body by Elevation Worship
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPDmGctliYs>

DAY #2

A Shelter from the Storm *By Leanna Simpson*

PROVERBS 18:10

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.

If you have never been to AGAPE, we are located within the inner city of Des Moines, Iowa surrounded by drug addiction, homelessness, crime, and poverty.

A few months ago, we updated our name and logo. With that update, we discarded our old signage. As we were throwing our old metal signs into the dumpster, a homeless woman came out of the woods. She was curious about what we were throwing away. We showed her and explained that it was our old signs. The signs read: **Agape: A place to find help & hope, care & compassion.**

“May I have them to make a shelter?” she said. It felt weird handing her our signs, but we could not refuse her.

That evening, storms were ravaging, and the rain was beating down. I laid awake in my bed thinking about this woman. I was imagining her huddled underneath the lean-to shelter of our signs, shaking, cold and trembling. The words reflecting on the sheet metal as the lighting lit up the sky: Agape: A place to find help & hope, care & compassion. AGAPE means God’s perfect, unending and unending love. Under this physical shelter, she was being covered.

My friends, if this is not a picture of what God does in our lives, I don’t know what is.

Weeks went by, and we had not seen the woman again. One evening, as we were getting ready to lock our doors, she ran into our waiting room. Physically dirty and shaking from the drugs she had just taken; we recognized her face. It was the woman who had made a shelter of our signs. Shaking from head to toe, she said: “I think I might be pregnant... can you help me?”

She knew where to run. She knew where to find help & hope, care & compassion. She ran to AGAPE.

Today, if life feels like a storm is raging around you, run to the One who can shelter you from the storm. He is waiting. Run to Him.

Additional Scriptures: 1 John 4:7-21

Worship Song: Heart of God by Zach Williams
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mM4LNKjhJZg>



DAY #3

This World Needs a Hero *By Leanna Simpson*

PSALMS 18:18-19

They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

Over these last few years, AGAPE has leaned in and lived out the reality that God's ways are higher and greater than our own. He has and always will know how to reach the heart of man. All we must do is listen and obey.

Four years ago, we began a massive "trust fall" exercise. A climate of placing our "yes" on the table and then moving forward in faith, trusting in His plan, provision, and promises. This has been hard at times but eternally impactful.

All these steps of faith have been a part of living out the call that God has placed upon AGAPE. We desire to provide every family with the support they need to move themselves and their children out of a place of survival and fear into a position of safety and stability.

At times, this can be an overwhelming task. Those we are called to support continue to grow by leaps and bounds and so do the challenges that they bring. It requires a village of heroes to act.

People need heroes. They need a "superpower" work to be done.

This past month a supporter called because **he was struck with the reality that the children we serve may have tangible needs not being met.**

He asked, "Do you know if any children need beds? I would love to donate some beds to the children you serve."

We immediately gave him our "yes" and today 14 children have beds to sleep in.

This is the "superpower" work that is happening because we know the Hero that we all ultimately seek. His power is moving, and He is allowing us to be a part of it!

Ultimately, Jesus is our Hero. He changes everything. He has changed me. He can change you, too.

Additional Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21

Worship Song: To the Table by Zach Williams
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9N-bGVtKDC>



DAY #5

Eyes to See *By Leanna Simpson*

LUKE 24:31

Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

She walks into the waiting room with her head hung low. Her friend nudged her along, “It’s OK, they will help you. Believe me... they know what to do.” We sit and we listen as she talks. Fleeing domestic abuse, living in her car, addicted to drugs, and now pregnant. We listen and we cry. We know there is better for her and her baby. We make some calls. We find her shelter in a safe place. We got her some food to eat. We pray with her. We watched her drive away. We are left staring at the horizon often wondering whatever came of her story and her life.

When we meet *her*, we are reminded of Luke 24:14-31. This passage took place right after the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Read along with this passage:

As they walked along, they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.”

“What things?” Jesus asked.

“The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,” they said. “He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. “Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.”

Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote

in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

*By this time, they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. **Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.** And at that moment he disappeared!*

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was buried in a tomb. His followers believed there was no hope. All was lost and only despair remained. This, my friends, is the despair that this world feels.

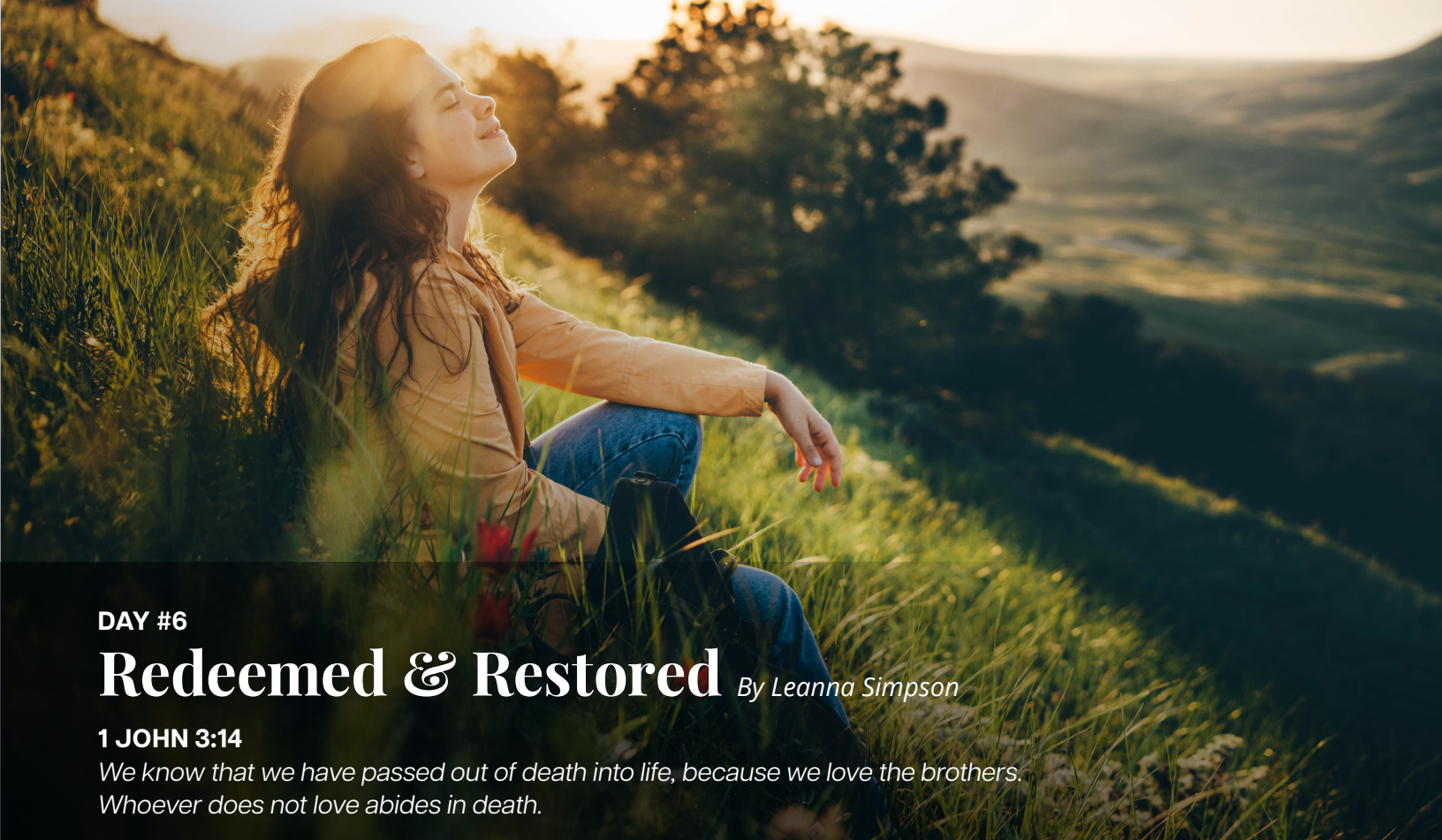
We are all on the Road to Emmaus. We have all been seeking, blind, and wanting answers. Jesus has been there all along.

Open your Eyes, my friend. Jesus is waiting.

Additional Scriptures: Luke 24: 14-31

Worship Song: Heart of God by Zach Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mM4LNKjhJZg>



DAY #6

Redeemed & Restored By Leanna Simpson

1 JOHN 3:14

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

We are so grateful that you have joined us this week for our intentional focus on the testimonies of the goodness of our God and His work.

Today, we will share a powerful story of God's work through a testimony from one of AGAPE's clients:

She had just found out that she was facing another unplanned pregnancy and was feeling very alone and overwhelmed. Then, the phone rang. The AGAPE team member was calling about their Mother's Day photo shoot. She couldn't help but break down and cry. She has never been able to afford professional photos for my boys or my family.

She thought, "Wow, maybe I am not alone after all."

She was excited but quickly remembered that she had nothing to match her boys' new Easter shirts. With only a few dollars and a fleeting prayer, she decided to go to the local thrift store to see if she could find something that she could afford to match her boys. She had \$3. That's it, just \$3. Then She saw the perfect dress and it was just her size! When she looked at the price tag, she couldn't believe it. \$1.79. She thought to myself, "Maybe there is a God who sees... and maybe He sees me.

God was drawing her. She had joined the Alpha Bible program at AGAPE. She was asking a lot of questions about God, Who He is, how He works, and what His plan was for her. We could see He was working in her heart and in her life.

On Mother's Day, the father of her children collapsed. She called "911" and he was rushed by ambulance and admitted into the hospital. The news was unexpected and profoundly grave. Cancer unknowingly had ravaged his body. He has been given weeks to live.

The next week, she shared with the staff the terrible prognosis and everything that is currently happening with his health and her life circumstances.

*As she looked straight into our eyes, she said with tears streaming down her face, **"But there is one good thing. I want you to know that I choose Christ. I have accepted Him as my Savior. I know that no matter what comes, I will never be alone."***

We stand in every room. We watch Him do what only He can do. We don't write stories and we don't change lives; He does.

We must collectively remind one another that no schemes of hell can ever stop the power of our God. Any denial of His existence, His power, His creation, and what He values are continually invalidated through the evidential proof of His power in the lives that are redeemed and restored through the supernatural power of His Spirit.

No one is ever outside of His reach. He loves you. Trust in Him today.

Additional Scriptures: 1 John 3: 1-24

Worship Song: Believe for It by CeCe Winans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnJDccj0bQQ>