**Week 1 - DWTS Intro His Scars Heal Our Scars**

**This Week’s Hero:** Jesus

**Scripture References:** Read Isaiah 53:5 and John 20:24-29

**His Scars:** Jesus Christ is the most unique figure in all of humanity. Never did anyone speak such red-hot scorching words about sin, yet at the same time speak such grace-filled words of hope to sinners. His voice, which commanded the universe into existence, would later whisper words of love and forgiveness to saint and sinner alike. His hands, which carefully formed the earth and everything in it, would eventually bear the marks of death on a cross.

“*The only man-made thing in Heaven are the scars of Jesus*.” Or so says the old quote. Based on the accounts in Scripture, we know the resurrected Savior chose to keep the scars He received on the cross – they are a visible reminder for all believers of the cost of our salvation and the marks of Christ’s indescribable love for us. Despite the fact that it was mankind’s inequities (*immorality and guilt*) and transgressions (*rebellion*) which sent Him to suffer death on a Roman cross, it was through that very cross Christ chose to offer redemption to the world. It is a redemption we neither deserve nor can comprehend.

He graced the earth with a 33-year long ministry which not only turned the Jewish religious establishment on its ears, but redefined mankind’s relationship with both God and with each other. Had Jesus simply accomplished these things, history would have remembered Him in vivid color. But as countless changed lives have revealed over the centuries, His life was so much more than merely shaking up social structures and modeling goodwill.

**His Healing:** Jesus Christ, through His crucifixion, death, and resurrection, defeated the power of sin and death. Through His scars, He extends to all mankind forgiveness for sins past, present, and future. Through His scars, He restores and renews what sin mars and destroys. Jesus, this week’s Hero, did not come to make bad people good – He came to make dead people *alive*. His scars are living proof of His power, His love, and His authority to do just that.

We all bear scars; they seem to be an inescapable part of life. But not all of our scars are visible – some are hidden far beneath the surface. They are scars from the love we desperately wanted but never received, the trauma of abuse we didn’t deserve, the wounds from words we can’t stop hearing. But there is hope in Christ! The prophet Isaiah said that through Christ’s suffering, we would receive peace and healing (Isaiah 53:5). Christ redeems the scars meant to destroy us. He places His own scars over ours and trades our defeats for His victory.

**Discussion Questions:**

* What questions do you have about this section?
* Hippocrates said, “*Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity*.”
  + How does Jesus offer the opportunity for healing?
* Every scar tells a story. For those willing, share a physical scar from childhood and how you got it. (*ex. A scar from a scraped knee while learning how to ride a bike*.)
* Read Psalm 107:1-2.
  + What are some examples of “life scars” people may bear?
  + Not all the stories behind our scars are fun to tell. How does Jesus change the way we look at the scars life has given us?
  + Why would Christ ask us to share some of the most painful, poignant times of our lives?
* As a group, how can we encourage one another toward redemption?

**Week 2 – DWTS: Abuse**

**This Week’s Overcomer:** “Her Name is Shame”

**Scripture Reference:** Read Mark 5:21-34

**Her Scars:** The woman suffering from bleeding had been ostracized for twelve, long, lonely years. In first century Jewish society, her medical condition reduced her to living as an outcast and as such, everything she touched became defiled. Because of the Levitical Laws regarding illness and bleeding, touching this woman (and anything associated with her) would render a devout Jew “unclean”. An unclean person could not participate in corporate worship and had to remain separated from the daily activities of friends and family so as to not spread “uncleanness”. Thus, the bleeding woman suffered alone, truly making her feel as if her name was “Shame”. It was inevitable that when she reached out to others for help they would recoil in horror. She must have felt as though she had nowhere to turn and no one to turn to.

**Her Healing:** Living as a victim of abuse of any kind can make us feel the way the woman named “Shame” must have felt; that we are somehow untouchable, unlovable, unworthy; that we are just “un-”. But these feelings are not accurate reflections of reality. While our circumstances may have had a part in shaping us, they do not define us. God wants you to know the truth – He defines who you are and you are not “un-” in His eyes. You are His child, precious and loved, and He longs to bring you out of a place of shame and into a place of honor. He does this through the restoring power of Christ.

As the woman named “Shame” found, the touch of Jesus brings life and restoration. Previously rejected by those who should have loved her, even “Shame” realized that ALL are worthy to touch the hem of His garment. She summoned just enough faith to reach out and dared to hope He could help her. What she discovered is then true for all of us now - Jesus will rush in to rescue even those with the most tremulous of faiths. This week’s Overcomer started her story in defeated loneliness but she ends her story in victory. And because of her faith, her name is changed by Jesus Himself – she is no longer called “Shame”. Her name now reflects the precious love she has accepted: her name is “Daughter”.

**Discussion Questions:**

* What do you like best about this story? Why?
* What are some circumstances in our culture that might cause someone to be considered an “outcast”?
  + What is the duty of a follower of Christ when confronted with “outcasts” in society? (Hint: Read Matthew 25:40.)
  + How might you better follow Christ’s command to love others?
* Read Jeremiah 30:17
  + What two things does God promise to do?
  + Continue reading verses 18-22 in Jeremiah 30. These words are directed at the nation of Israel, a model of how God intends to keep the promises He made to the Jewish people. As believers in Christ, we are covenanted with God and included in His promises. How might these verses be applied in your own life?
  + Look at verse 22. What does this say about the relationship God desires to have with you?
* As a group, how can we encourage one another toward restoration?

**Week 3 - DWTS Anxiety and Depression**

**This Week’s** **Overcomer**: John the Baptist

**Scripture Reference:** Read John 1:29-34 and Matthew 11:1-15

**His Scars:** John the Baptist, preaching to a crowd of eager listeners, loudly proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth to be the long-awaited Messiah. After publically baptizing Jesus, John encouraged his own would-be band of supporters to follow the Nazarene, boldly declaring Him to be, “The Lamb of God.” But, by the time John shows up again in Matthew 11, his life had taken a decidedly unexpected turn. Herod Antipas, King of Galilee, was incensed at John’s preaching and had him arrested. Herod’s wife, equally enraged by John, devised a plan which would ultimately lead to John’s barbaric execution. Thus, John finds himself in a hopeless situation: alone, confused, and having no control over his circumstances. Feeling completely abandoned by the very Christ he had previously proclaimed, John laments, wondering if Jesus was really even the person John had so firmly believed Him to be.

**His Healing:** Life can sometimes leave us feeling as though we are floundering in the deep, weighed down by doubts and anxieties. Depression can close in and we feel as though there is literally no way out. It’s important to remember our problems will always seem overwhelming when we assign dominion to a *situation* instead of to God. The Lord sees a picture far bigger than we ever can comprehend and this is why we are told in Romans 8:28, “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*.” Even when we cannot feel or see the hand of God in our situation, as followers of Christ we are assured He is working - often in ways we cannot understand.

In the depths of his depression and doubt, this week’s Overcomer, John, reached *up*, asking Jesus for help. John sent a messenger to Jesus, questioning his situation and Jesus’s ability to handle it. Far from condemning John’s despondent state, Jesus answered with compassion. He sent a response to John telling him of what Christ had already done and reminding John of Jesus’s ability to accomplish exactly what He said He could. Our knowledge of what Jesus has done in the past will confirm what He can do for us in the future with His healing, life-changing power. Though John’s earthly situation did not look the way he wanted, his ultimate purpose in the Kingdom of Christ was played out in accordance with his dedicated obedience to God’s direction.

**Discussion Questions:**

* What surprises you about this story? Why?
  + Read the following quote from CS Lewis’s The Screwtape Letters:

(Writing from a demon’s point of view) “*Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will* [God’s will]*, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.”*

* + How might this quote relate to John’s faithfulness to Jesus even after being imprisoned?
  + How can adversity serve to strengthen your walk with Christ?
* Read Psalm 34:18, “The Lord is close to the *brokenhearted* and saves those who are *crushed* in spirit.”
  + In this passage, the word “*brokenhearted*” refers to a heart which has been shattered or broken. Subsequently, the word “*crushed*” is used to describe something ground into powder. How do these words reflect God’s understanding our feelings of doubt, anxiety, and depression?
  + God’s promise is to provide us way to bear anything which our way. This might be through the provision of medication. While some aspects of mental issues can beyond our control, we are empowered, through the Holy Spirit, to control how we handle the symptoms. We need not feel as though we are victims to our circumstances.
    - If God truly understands and empathizes with emotional pain, how does this change your feelings about Him? About mental illness?
* As a group, how can we encourage one another toward perseverance?

**Week 4 - DWTS Aftermath (tragedy and loss)**

**This Week’s** **Overcomers**: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

**Scripture Reference:** ReadJohn 11:1-44

**Their Scars:** Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were certainly no strangers to Jesus. Scripture seems to indicate they were close. So when Lazarus became deathly ill, the sisters immediately sent word to their faithful friend, Jesus. No doubt they were aware of His ability to heal and had no reason to think their friend, the gracious and affectionate rabbi, would delay in rushing to their brother’s aid.

As his illness progressed, Lazarus must have wondered why his friend was nowhere to be found. His sisters, Mary and Martha, were no doubt vacillating between the terror of losing their brother and the anger that comes with feeling betrayed. When Jesus finally arrived, it was days after they had buried their brother. Martha was the first to speak to Jesus and through her tears she questioned what for her seemed to be His failure to help them in their time of greatest need. Both sisters felt as though Jesus had let them down.

**Their Healing:** Words do no justice to the mind-numbing shock that accompanies unforeseen tragedy or the stark rawness which comes with losing a loved-one. Loss of any kind leaves us feeling a wide range of emotions: vulnerable, betrayed, angry, empty. We find ourselves desperately trying to make sense of what we are experiencing and it is in this cacophony of emotion we find ourselves asking questions about the God we want to believe loves us: *Where is He? Doesn’t He care? Why did He let this happen?*

The reality is Jesus never abstains from the chaos of tragedy; His place is always at the side of those hurting, even when we don’t realize it. This week’s Overcomers faced heartrending losses. Their pain stemmed not just from the intrusion of death in their lives, but from the utter disappointment that comes with feeling as though prayers have gone unanswered. And yet Jesus did not rebuke their tearful accusations; He did not brush off their confusion at how the week’s events had played out. Quite the opposite, He acknowledged their pain with tears of His own. To Mary and Martha’s credit, they held to their faith in His ability to make sense of their loss. They clung, against all odds, to the notion that Jesus loved them and was working in their situation even as they believed Him to have been absent in their moment of greatest need. It was then they saw that Christ’s resurrection power is capable of more than we can understand.

Lazarus, four days dead, was restored to them. The story of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha shows us that Jesus can deliver anyone from anything – no hurt lies beyond His ability to heal. Through them we learn God can bring healing from the ashes of our tragedy.

**Discussion Questions:**

* Think about the range and level of emotions displayed in this story:
  + What do you think Lazarus was thinking as he lay dying?
  + Why do you think Mary stayed in her house when Jesus first arrived?
  + Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, even as He knew He was about to restore Lazarus to life. What does this say about how Jesus views our feelings in the midst of tragedy and loss?
* Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.
  + Look up the words “compassion” and “comfort”. What are some of the ways God comforts and shows compassion?
  + What does God intend for His followers to do with their experiences in tragedy and loss?
  + How does comforting others help us deal with our own painful situations?
* As a group, how can we encourage one another toward healing?

**Week 5 - DWTS Addiction**

**This Week’s** **Overcomer**: The Woman at the Well

**Scripture Reference:** Read John 4:1-30

**Her Scars:** - Sadly, with five previous husbands in her past and a sixth man back at home, the woman at the well more than likely had a reputation which superseded her name. Scholars differ on the reasons why this particular woman may have had 5 different husbands. Some have offered that she was the victim of abuse. Others surmised she was actually a woman of loose virtue, trading one bad relationship for the next. But most telling in her story is that by the time she met Jesus, she was living with a man with whom she was neither legally or ethically partnered with. At this point in history she would have been labeled many things: none of them nice. Her perceived penchant for using sex to fill the emotional, financial, and spiritual voids in her life had rendered her an outcast in the community. But when Jesus met her that fateful day, He did not see a woman trapped by her addiction; He saw a person, rejected and desperate, simply longing to be loved.

**Her Healing:** Addiction comes in many forms. In almost all cases, the addictive behavior is not the true issue – it is the coping mechanism by which we seek to deal with the demons which haunt us. Addiction can seem insurmountable when we seek to free ourselves using our own strength. The reality is addictions and the pain behind them can only be tamed with the resurrection power of Christ; He and He alone possesses the strength to help us to take on the day-by-day struggle to combat our habits and hang-ups. This week’s Overcomer triumphs over her addictive behavior through the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is quoted as saying, “*Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase*.” So it is with battling addictions. The woman at the well took one small, but vital step – she allowed Jesus to speak truth into her life. In His gentle but pointed way, Jesus showed her where the source of her pain lay. In her desire to feel safe and loved she had repeatedly turned to what she thought would help her, but instead of soothing her pain, her addictions only intensified it. By allowing Christ to speak truth into her life, the woman at the well opened the door for Jesus to fill the void in her soul and soothe the ache in her spirit. Thus began her recovery. As Dr. King’s quote alludes, battling addictions can be a series of uphill steps, but those who travel with Christ at their side do not climb the staircase alone. As the woman at the well found, there is life-giving water for all who desire Christ’s healing.

**Discussion Questions:**

* What surprises you about this story? Why?
* What is your definition of “addiction”?
* Read 1 Corinthians 10:13-14
  + How might this verse relate the addictions we face?
  + Re-read this portion of the verse: “*And God is faithful;* *he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*.” What does this mean to you?
  + A follower of Christ has the Holy Spirit to guide and counsel him/her. In light of this, by whose strength can we resist the temptations of addictive behaviors?
  + If it is God’s strength which helps us resist temptation, then is there any limit to what we can bear?
  + How would you reword these verses to reflect your own reality when it comes to resisting temptations?
  + What means might God provide as “ways out” when someone is wrestling with addictive behaviors?
* As a group, how can we encourage one another toward daily victory?