


VIDEO-BASED
7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

KRISTI MCLELLAND



*Jesus
& Women*

IN THE FIRST CENTURY AND NOW

KRISTI MCLELLAND

Jesus
& Women

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristi McLelland is a speaker, teacher, and college professor. Since completing her Masters of Arts in Christian Education at Dallas Theological Seminary, she has dedicated her life to discipleship, to teaching people how to study the Bible for themselves, and to writing about how God is better than we ever knew by explaining the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens. Her great desire for people to truly experience the love of God birthed a ministry in which she leads biblical study trips to Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

For more information about Kristi and what she's up to, visit: NewLensBiblicalStudies.com.



INTRODUCTION

“A BIBLE WITH ITS JEWISHNESS WRUNG OUT OF IT IS NO BIBLE. A CHRIST WITH HIS JEWISHNESS OBSCURED IS NO CHRIST AT ALL.”¹

—DR. RUSSELL MOORE

Every adventure begins in a moment, and the best ones come to us. In 2007 an adventure found me. The Lord opened the door for me to go study the Bible in Egypt and Israel.

At the time, I was teaching Bible in the Biblical Studies department at Williamson College. I went to the Middle East in a spirit of professional development, just to learn, but God had other plans—much better plans.

In Israel I was amazed to see how different the Middle Eastern culture was and is from our Western culture. I started noticing how I was approaching the Bible as a Westerner, seeing it with Western eyes and asking Western questions of the biblical text. In Israel I learned the Bible through a cultural lens, the Middle Eastern lens.

In these early days of my Middle Eastern study, God totally and thoroughly wrecked me in the best of ways. He completely transformed me.

Learning the Bible in its original historical, cultural, linguistic, and geographic context allowed me to get to know Jesus in *His* Jewish world. I didn't just fly over to Israel; it felt almost as if I went back in time to learn about the first-century world of the Bible, the world Jesus lived in two thousand years ago.

“WE HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT WE READ THE BIBLE AS FOREIGNERS, AS VISITORS WHO HAVE TRAVELED NOT ONLY TO A NEW GEOGRAPHY BUT A NEW CENTURY. WE ARE LITERARY TOURISTS WHO ARE DEEPLY IN NEED OF A GUIDE.”²

—GARY M. BURGE

You may be wondering about the meaning behind the cover of our study. The vessel pictured there is a tear jar, an actual archaeological artifact dating back to the first or second century AD. It was uncovered in Israel where one of my professors gave it to me as a gift.

This tear jar most likely belonged to a Jewish woman in antiquity, maybe even in the lifetime of Jesus' earthly ministry. In the ancient Near East, Jewish women collected their tears in a tear jar and poured them out to God in worship as a sign of faith, embodying God's message in Psalm 56:8 where He says He keeps our tears in a bottle. I look at the tear jar often and wonder what the original owner's story might have looked like—what she experienced, her highs and lows. I wonder where she kept her jar and how often she pulled it out to collect her tears before the Lord.

To me, the tear jar represents some of what the woman in Jesus' first-century world would have experienced. She was not always valued by society; she was often marginalized in the culture of the day. And yet God saw her grief and her struggle. He encouraged her to bring the pain to Him in worship and prayer. And, then, in Jesus, He worked to restore woman and show her His redemptive purposes in her life. He valued her; He lifted her up out of shame. He set her on the path to life. And He desires to do the same for you and for me, as followers of Christ.

I went to Israel and learned that God is *better* than I ever knew.

This understanding of who God is has changed me, and it's changing me still. I believe it will do the same for you. My time in Israel marked my life and shifted its direction entirely. I've been taking teams to Israel for biblical study trips ever since my first study trip in 2007. The gift given to me has become my gift to give others. My hope is for this study to be that gift to you.

The Bible was primarily written by Middle Easterners in a Middle Eastern context. Deeper insight into the Middle Eastern culture and historical context of the time in which the Bible was written will greatly add to our understanding of what the biblical authors meant by what they wrote and what the people described in the Bible did.

One of the major differences between Western and Eastern culture is *how* we teach and *how* we learn. We, in the West, are more of a Greco-Roman culture. We prize

literature. We read sitting at desks, study with books in our hands, take notes, fill in the answers, and finish our workbooks.

Teaching and learning are different in the Middle East—they're different now, and they were different for Jesus in His time on earth. Middle Eastern teaching is visual; a rabbi teaches on the go. When Jesus taught, He could usually see the object of His lessons, and His disciples could see it too. This teaching style was not philosophical. It was right here. It was not “up there;” it was “down here.”

Jesus' style wasn't to provide a syllabus or a workbook. He was more likely to walk through a field of mustard seed while sharing a parable about how the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

In the Middle Eastern tradition of learning, the student wants to stay very close to the rabbi so as not to lose any of his words. And the student never knows when or where the rabbi will begin teaching! In the Middle Eastern way, students learn through discovery rather than the acquisition of knowledge. This is how a rabbi teaches—he guides you into discovery. And this is how I want to guide you through our seven weeks together.

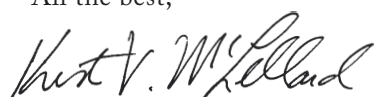
We are going to strive to view the Bible with a Middle Eastern lens and, at the same time, study a few Bible passages in a traditionally Jewish way, the way rabbis still teach the children in Israel today. We will walk into discoveries together rather than simply being taught the content or lesson.

This seven-week feast is my attempt to set a biblical table around which we can come together and discover Jesus' heart for women in His first-century world. At this table, we take off our Western lenses and put on our Middle Eastern lenses. I'll continue to share bits and pieces along the way to guide you in shaping your Middle Eastern lens.

I'm so honored and expectant to share in this seven-week biblical feast with you. In some ancient way, the Lord saw this for us before the foundations of the world were ever even laid. He's drawing us to this table, and *He* will do the feeding.

Posture yourself to receive.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Krist V. McLeod". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name "All the best,".

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

In our time together, we're going to study God's Word in a way that might seem a bit different from what you've experienced in the past. As I mentioned in the introduction, we are going to strive to view the Bible with a Middle Eastern lens and, at the same time, study a few Bible passages in a traditionally Jewish way, the way the rabbis would have taught Jesus the Bible, the way some rabbis still teach the children in Israel today.

With that in mind, let's discuss a bit of the framework for our study:

We approach the Scriptures as children expecting to be fed by our Father.

It can be easy to sit down with our Bibles and think something like, *OK, let me figure out some application from the passage I'm reading today*. I have good news for you—we are not spiritual orphans. We have a gracious heavenly Father who feeds us to the full with His Word; He gives abundantly. As we read the Word, we do our part by being open to what God will teach us. We posture ourselves to obey and to be gratefully fed by the Living God through His Word and by the power of His Spirit. But God is in charge of feeding us.

We're not looking for the "right" answer.

Though it may sound strange to our Western ears, in Judaism, the student with good questions is better than the student with all of the right answers. We never just read the Bible; we interact with it, asking questions of the text. We want to know what a text teaches us about God before we ask what it teaches us about ourselves. In our time together, we're going to focus on interacting with the biblical text in community, and we're going to learn to be OK with questions that cannot be easily answered and even questions that may leave us scratching our heads with a bit of mystery.

We want God's Word to become a part of who we are.

The Middle Eastern way of learning falls in line with more of an oral teaching tradition, less so the more formal learning style of our Western world. In our study together, we want these concepts in God's Word to get into our hearts and minds so much that they become a part of who we are, changing the way we see God and interact with the world. You'll notice we will revisit some of the same concepts each week; the study is intentionally crafted in this way. By the end of our time together, I hope these biblical concepts are so clear and familiar they are almost like second nature to you.

Learning will be a community endeavor in our time together.

In the Middle Eastern way, learning is very communal. Here's what I mean: in a Middle Eastern context, it would be common to see rabbis teaching students as they walk down the road. This teaching tradition places significant value on students discussing an issue with one another. Rabbis often instruct their students to "go first" and discuss what they believe about a teaching before the teacher explains the concept to them. We're going to adopt some of those ideas in our time together. In many cases, I'll "go first" in our feast teaching times. But you'll notice group discussion guides that I've crafted especially for you to use as you *yeshiva*, or discuss biblical texts together, after we begin unpacking them in our video teaching times.

Each week, you'll find the following sections:

The *Watch* section includes summaries of our video teaching, to help you as you follow along. Feel free to add your own notes here as you watch.

The *Discuss* section includes questions (based on the video teaching and the personal study each week) for your small group to explore together.

In the *Follow-up* section, we'll dive into further insight on a topic we discussed in our feast teaching times.

In the *Look* section, we'll highlight a Middle Eastern insight or cultural emphasis more in-depth to further your understanding of Jesus' first-century world.

In the *Learn* section, we'll take a passage of Scripture and consider it in light of a Middle Eastern lens.

In the *Live* section, we'll take some time to help you apply the concepts you're learning to your own life.

The *Watch* and *Discuss* times are meant to be completed with your small group. But the *Follow-up*, *Look*, *Learn*, and *Live* sections are for your personal study time. Instead of labeling them by days of study, we've labeled them by sections. Feel free to complete each between our weekly group times as you see fit throughout the week. Please note, terms in the text marked with **this style** are explained in further detail in the glossary on pages 144–153.

Let's get started.

SESSION ONE

*MEETING
THE MIDDLE
EASTERN
JESUS*



As we prepare to watch our first video teaching together, we are getting ready to pull up our chairs for Session One of this biblical feast. I call our study times together feasts because we don't so much read the Word of God as eat it. We take it in—we let it do its work in us.

For me, the best meal is one I do not have to cook, and that's absolutely true when we come to the Word of God. God prepares this feast for us. We come to this moment and to this table believing the Living God will feed us. We are not orphans, and we are not fatherless. We do not have to scrounge, strive, or strain to feed ourselves the Word of God. We can simply, yet profoundly, posture ourselves to receive the feast the Lord has prepared for us—for you.

As we come to this biblical table, before you watch the video teaching, take a few moments to answer the following questions:

Why did you say yes to this feast?

What are you asking the Lord to do in your life through this seven-week feast?

Finish this sentence:

"I am here because my heart needs _____."

Sit back. Breathe deep. Enjoy the feast!

THE FEAST

Use the following notes and space provided during our feast teaching time. Feel free to add your own notes as you watch.

We eat the Word of God. It is sweeter than honey (Ps. 19:10).

We do not scrounge, strive, or strain to feed ourselves the Word of God. We posture ourselves to receive from God (Ps. 81:10).

We tend to stare at our lives and glance at God. We want to stare at God and glance at our lives.

The right hand in the biblical world was the hand of favor, honor, blessing, and sonship (Ps. 110:1).

We want to be a “right-hand people,” who bless and honor others.

Western learning is different from Middle Eastern learning. Most of the Bible was written by Middle Easterners in a Middle Eastern context. In our time together, we want to learn to read the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens.

WESTERN LENS	MIDDLE EASTERN LENS
Form	Function
How? <i>How did it happen?</i>	Why? <i>Why would God do that?</i>
Understand → Believe	Believe → Understand
Law, Rule, Principle	Story, Narrative
What does it teach me about <i>me</i> ?	What does it teach me about <i>God</i> ?
Dig deep, get down in it ... (Analysis—pick it apart)	Read through it ... (Synthesis—bring it together)
Study to acquire <i>knowledge</i>	Posture to be <i>fed</i>

Reading the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens *adds* to our understanding of what the biblical authors and people featured in the Bible meant by what they *said* and *did*.

We want to live like rivers, not lakes. We want the Word to travel to us, through us, to others.

We have truly learned a thing when we can give it away.

LET'S YESHIVA!

As we discussed in our first “biblical feast” together, Middle Easterners most often learn and cultivate spiritual growth within the context of community and group conversation. With this cultural difference in mind, each week we’re going to practice *yeshiva* together—what we might call “workshopping” or “brainstorming” around a topic in our Western culture—dialoguing openly about a biblical concept and walking together as a community with Jesus as our Rabbi. Discuss the following questions with your group.

What did you just *hear* or *see* in our feast together that you want to remember?

What one thing that we learned in our feast would you want to share with others this week?

What would it look like for you to posture yourself to receive when you read your Bible?

How does the concept of *eating* the Word of God differ from *reading* the Word of God?

Which element on the Western versus Middle Eastern Lens Chart (p. 14) stuck out to you the most?

What in your life right now makes you want to reach out and touch Jesus’ wing?

What do you think people two thousand years ago would have noticed the most about Jesus?

What do you think would have made Jesus seem different or “other” to the people of His day?

YESHIVA

Today, *yeshiva* is a formal term referring to an established educational system that focuses on studying the Torah and the *Talmud*.¹

In the first century, however, the emphasis lay in how a teacher interpreted a specific passage of Scripture or theological concept and whether that teaching was valid.² How would a community determine the validity of a biblical teaching? *Yeshiva*.

Stemming from the Hebrew verb meaning “to dwell,” *yeshiva* occurred when students would discuss or debate questions or comments from a teacher.³

LIVING LIKE A RIVER, NOT A LAKE

I've been taking team members to the Jordan River for eleven years now. The Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee into the Dead Sea. The water moves, flows—it's living water, *mayim chayim*.⁴ I've also floated in the Dead Sea for eleven years now. The water in the Dead Sea is still, motionless—it's dead water.

As a college professor, I tell my students all the time, “You haven't learned a thing when you've seen it. You haven't learned a thing when you've heard it. You haven't learned a thing when you have seen and heard it. You've learned a thing when you can give it away.” We want the Word of God to travel through us to others, moving freely as a river would. We are not supposed to hold what God is teaching us to ourselves, motionless like the Dead Sea.

The things the Lord reveals to you—feeds you in this feast—are meant to travel through you to others. We want to live like rivers, not lakes.

Consider the following questions and record your answers below:
How can this feast travel through you this week?

Who needs to hear the truths you've learned at this week's feast?

Who can you be a river for this week?



TALLIT

TORAH

Just as Christians have subdivided the Old Testament into categories (for example, Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets, Minor Prophets), the Jews have divided their sacred text. Torah is a section of Jewish Scripture that includes instruction and the Law.

For the Jews, nothing is more important than Torah. It's the first place they go when deriving authority from Scripture. The books of Torah include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—what scholars today call the Pentateuch (literally “five books”). Though traditionally translated as “law,” the word *Torah* implies instruction more than law. According to Torah, the commandments offer freedom more than oppression. They serve as parameters that allow a person to function well in her family, tribe, and nation.⁵

The *tallit* is a prayer shawl. It has been used and is still used today in a variety of ways, depending on a person's tradition and orthodoxy. The *tallit* is often worn in prayer and worship.⁶ In Numbers 15:37-40 and Deuteronomy 22:12, the Torah instructed the Israelites to put tassels (*tzitzit*) on the corners of their garments.⁷

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by chasing after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God.’”

NUMBERS 15:37-40

Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear.

DEUTERONOMY 22:12

Each knot represents the commandments—the instructions to live in shalom—to keep the way of life in front of God's people.

Each *tzitzit* (tassel) contains several little knots—for a combined total of 613 knots on a *tallit*, each representing one of the commandments in the Torah.⁸ Every time the Israelites saw the knots on the tassels, they were to remember the commandments. The Hebrew word used for the corner of the *tallit*, *kanafayim* (corners), can also mean “wings.”⁹ Likely, the tassels were permanently fixed on the corners or wings of the outer hem of the garment.

The Torah also instructed the Israelites to run a blue or violet cord through the tassels on their *tallits*. Both rabbinic sources and archaeological data tell us the blue dye used to color these tassels was made from a gland of the Murex snail (located in the Mediterranean). Each snail produced a very small amount of dye, making it very expensive.¹⁰

Neighboring cultures used the colors blue and violet as symbols and signs for royalty. For the Israelites, this blue or violet cord may have been a sign or a symbol of the royal status of the entire community. The Israelite priests wore ephods, sleeveless garments, made with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn (Ex. 28:6). The blue cord in every Israelite's tassel symbolized they were *all* to be a royal priesthood among the nations—each and every one of them.

This idea of the royalty of the nation of Israel was tied to God's covenant relationship with them. The Israelites were not royal because of any worldly qualifications, but they were a royal community because they were God's people (Deut. 7:6-7). God set them apart with His love, and His love lifted them up.

God's choice to remind His people of their royal lineage in Him is especially impactful when you consider the fabric of Israelite culture and their national identity at the time God gave them this instruction. When God told them to run regal cords through their tassels, the people were still working to shed the national identity they had borne for so many years in Egypt, an identity associated with the onus of slavery. And God not only freed them from that slavery, but He immediately reminded them that He had made them regal and royal. It was as if God was saying, “I know what Egypt said you were and how you were mistreated there.

GOD NOT ONLY
FREED THE
ISRAELITES FROM
SLAVERY, BUT HE
IMMEDIATELY
REMINDED THEM
THAT HE MADE
THEM REGAL AND
ROYAL.

But I say you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation set apart by My love. Live in the identity I have given to you, forgetting any other label the world has tried to place on you.”

READ MATTHEW 9:20-22.

In Matthew 9 we see a woman with an ongoing issue of blood that had lasted twelve years. This condition would have rendered her unclean according to Jewish law. Being considered unclean according to Jewish law had some significant effects on her day-to-day life. She would not have been able to attend temple or synagogue; in this time and culture, that prohibition amounted to effectively being cut off from the religious community and teaching. God’s people and God’s house, places where we often find refuge and solace today—especially in times of suffering—were not a refuge for her. In fact, the religious community had effectively turned its back on her and avoided association with her.

She would have been considered on the “outside” of the social world—in other words, “socially dead.” These considerations are especially painful when you remember the communal nature of the Middle Eastern culture. This woman would have been shunned from society to the point that even her family members would not have been allowed to touch her or comfort her physically without becoming ceremonially unclean and excluded from the community until they could be ritually cleansed.¹¹ It’s hard for us to fathom how alone she must have felt.

Take a moment to imagine what this woman’s world and life must have been like. What do you think she would have most desired? What do you think might have caused her the greatest pain?

This woman, the one who had been dealing with years of pain—physical, emotional, and spiritual—reached for the “edge” of Jesus’ cloak (v. 20). The Greek word for “edge” used in this passage is *kraspedon*.¹² This same word appears in the **Septuagint**, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in reference to the tassels



that all Jews fixed on the “edges” or “corners/wings” of their outer garments. The Hebrew word for “edge” is *kanafayim*.

The woman with the issue of blood reached for Jesus’ healing *kanafayim/kraspedon*—corner, edge, wing—of His *tallit*.

READ MALACHI 4:2.

Consider what it must have taken for this woman to reach out to Jesus—a woman who had been isolated from the community of God’s people and access to spiritual teaching. I believe this woman acted out of significant faith. I think that in reaching out to grab the wing of Jesus’ *tallit*, she was taking God at His Word in Malachi 4:2 and was asserting her belief in Jesus as the Son of God. In spite of all she had been through, in spite of the way the religious community had probably shunned her, she exerted faith in Jesus. She placed her hope in God’s promises, in God’s character.

This scene in Matthew 9 seems to be a literal fulfillment of Malachi 4:2—“the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings” (CSB).

And don’t miss this. In this moment, Jesus rewarded her faith, healed her, *and* brought her back to life within her Jewish community. He provided physical and spiritual healing. By reaching out to her, He helped usher her back into society and stuck up for her in the eyes of the world. In her cultural context, the idea of someone unclean touching a holy rabbi like Jesus would have been scandalous and risky. According to the tradition of the day, Jesus would have had every right to react harshly toward her and dismiss her, maybe even kill her.¹³

Pay close attention to Jesus’ reaction here. He didn’t condemn. He didn’t dismiss. Instead, the Bible says Jesus turned to her, He saw her, and He said, “Take heart, daughter ... your faith has healed you” (Matt. 9:22). What a gospel-gorgeous truth. Praise the Living God.

In what area of your life do you need to hear God say, “Take heart, daughter”? Describe it below. Feel free to use a journal if you need more room to write. How does this story from Matthew 9 encourage you in that circumstance?

CARRYING THE WILDERNESS WITH YOU

READ EXODUS 3:1-10.



Look at this Bible passage through the **Western lens**, asking the question, “How did it happen?” Write down what you notice in this story.



Look at this Bible passage through the **Middle Eastern lens**, asking the question, “Why would God do that?” Write down what you notice in this story.

This story happened in the desert, in the wilderness. Moses was tending his father-in-law’s flock on “the far side of the wilderness” (v. 1). We often think of a desert or wilderness as something we want to get *out* of. But the Jewish people view the desert as the place where the Lord often meets His people and speaks to them.

The Lord met Moses in Exodus 3 in the desert and spoke to him. The Lord gave His Torah to His people at Mount Sinai in the desert (Ex. 20). He met Elijah in the desert and spoke to him in “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12, KJV). The Spirit led Jesus into the desert after His baptism. Angels attended to Him after His forty-day fast, His encounter with the devil, and His temptings (Matt. 4:1-11).

In the desert—the wilderness—God meets you and teaches you unique lessons that these dry and barren places frame in a way no other place would. In the Middle Eastern culture, the wilderness is seen almost as a sacred place, a place of intimacy, where God speaks a “word” (*davar*) to you.¹⁴

This story of Moses in the desert is about the Living God who “[saw] the misery of [His] people in Egypt” (Ex. 3:7a). He “heard them crying out because of their slave drivers” (v. 7b). He was “concerned about their suffering” (v. 7b). He responded to what He saw and heard by coming down to rescue them. In the Bible, when we read that the Lord “sees” or “hears” something, those words signal to us that He is going to *act*. (It’s not as if God has missed something—as if He were a man who could turn away and miss a glimpse or whisper of something that has happened. God is omnipresent; He sees and hears everything that happens to us.) He is responsive, alive, awake—ever-ready to come to the rescue, to attend to His children in guidance and love.

This story isn’t so much about a burning bush but about the Living God who refuses to look away. He chooses to see, to hear, to let it matter—to let it all matter. And it’s about the Living God who isn’t afraid to come down, get in the middle of the ruins of this world, and put His hands all over them to restore us. We run from drama. The Lord runs into it to bring rescue, restoration, and renewal.

When we are in a desert or wilderness season of life, we often ask, “How long do I have to be in this wilderness or desert?” Or we ask, “How do I get out of this difficult wilderness season?” But in the Middle East, they ask the questions, “How do I carry the wilderness with me?” “How do I remember the word the Lord taught me in the wilderness?”

Are you more likely to fear wilderness seasons and try to get out of them as quickly as possible? Or do you usually see them as a time of growth and intimacy with God, despite the difficulty? Explain.

THE LIVING GOD
ISN'T AFRAID TO
COME DOWN, GET
IN THE MIDDLE OF
THE RUINS OF THIS
WORLD, AND PUT
HIS HANDS ALL
OVER THEM TO
RESTORE US.

What would need to change in your heart for you to trust God more fully in wilderness seasons?

Who do you know who's going through a wilderness season right now?

How can you encourage him or her to listen for God in the desert?

LIVING FORWARD

Therefore I am now going to allure her;
 I will lead her into the wilderness
 and speak tenderly to her.
 There I will give her back her vineyards,
 and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
 There she will respond as in the days of her youth,
 as in the day she came up out of Egypt.
 "In that day," declares the LORD,
 "you will call me 'my husband';
 you will no longer call me 'my master.'
 I will betroth you to me forever;
 I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
 in love and compassion.
 I will betroth you in faithfulness,
 and you will acknowledge the LORD."

HOSEA 2:14-16,19-20

You may be familiar with the message of the Book of Hosea. The prophet Hosea (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) compared God's relationship with His people to a marriage relationship—a marriage in which Israel, God's people, was repeatedly unfaithful to God.

In the Hosea 2 passage above, we find an almost shocking illustration of God's covenant faithfulness to His children. The Living God marries His people in the wilderness, the desert, despite their unfaithfulness to the covenant He made with them. This passage pictures God's extraordinary, sacrificial love.

Israel would go on to do her worst while God did His best. She would chase after the gods of the nations. In other words, the bride in this illustration, the people of Israel, would not live up to her marriage vows. She would prostitute herself before the nations—just as Gomer was unfaithful in her marriage to Hosea (3:1). But God's love runs longer than our sin, and His atonement covers the whole of our sin. God and God alone would keep the marriage covenant. The Lord married Israel knowing she would not be able to keep every law, every commandment, and every vow. He did it because He knew He could and would. He knew that the Lamb of God would come one day to take away every sin.

The Lord drew Israel into the desert and spoke to her there. The place that seemed to only represent barrenness became one of restoration and redemption, of covenant pledge, of love everlasting. To me, Hosea 2 is one of the most beautiful passages in the whole Bible. It is so intimate, so intentional—the covenant love and promise of the Lord given to His people *in* the desert.

The Lord often speaks to His people in a special way in wilderness seasons. We want to carry these lessons and these times of intimate fellowship from the wilderness with us as we live and walk forward.

When was the last time you were in a desert or wilderness season?
Describe the situation below.

What did you learn during that time?

How did you see God respond on your behalf in that wilderness season?

How can the things learned in that wilderness season travel forward with you and strengthen you as you live your life?

How can you keep the lessons of the wilderness with you instead of dismissing them or trying to forget them?