**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?