



The Gospel of **JOHN**

Spring 2026 Group Guide

Course Outline

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Introduction & John 1 | The Word Became Flesh

Weekly Reading: John 1

Key Passage: John 1:1-19

The Gospel of John is a gospel unlike any other. The author is John the Apostle, who wrote this gospel at the very end of his life, likely around 90 AD. John had access to Matthew, Mark, and Luke which had already been written and shared, **so why did John choose to sit down and write another Gospel almost 30 years after the others?**

When you compare John to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, his reason for writing becomes clear. As a disciple and firsthand witness of Jesus' life and ministry John possesses his own distinctive perspective on Jesus and His ministry. John was part of the inner-circle of Jesus' disciples and even called the "beloved disciple". This title and his position among the 12 speaks to the intimacy he had with Jesus, and might explain why John's Gospel features teachings, miracles, and conversations that appear in none of the others. John's Gospel is often referred to as the theological or spiritual Gospel because certain parts feel like they are being told from heaven's perspective. Even though this book is deep and theological, John's purpose in writing is simple: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (20:30).

John is often recommended as both a great place for new believers to start as well as a book for veterans to return when they feel spiritually dry. I believe this is because in John all of us are invited to fall in love with Jesus and believe in Him. As we read the Gospel of John together over the next few months **I pray this study will bless you as you discover new Truths about Jesus and learn to trust Him with your whole heart.**

John 1:1-19 invites us to see Jesus' birth from an eternal perspective. So what do we learn about Jesus in this brief introduction? Jesus is God. Jesus is not just a good guy, He is the very Word of God and has been with God since the beginning. Jesus did not begin to exist in Bethlehem, he is eternal and helped create Bethlehem thousands of years prior. Jesus is the true light of the world, and he has come to shine the light into the darkness. John the Baptist came to prepare the way, but now Jesus has arrived on the scene and is going to change everything.

Weekly Challenge: Every week we will end our lesson with a weekly challenge for you to complete between group meetings and report back on at the beginning of your next gathering. This week the challenge is simply to spend some time praying and reflecting on what you hope to gain out of this study. Try and narrow this down to one word.

Special thanks to Meredith Kirk Thompson for her contributions to this study guide. Meredith holds a Masters of Arts in Old Testament from Biola University, has served at The Story Church in various roles and is a leader at The Grove Church.

John 2 | Jesus Conversation with Mary at Canna

Weekly Reading: John 2

Key Passage: John 2:1-12

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

John chapter 1 introduces us to Jesus, John the Baptist, and Jesus' disciples. John the Baptist's ministry announced Jesus as the Messiah who was promised in the Old Testament. The one who would take away the sins of the world. John's ministry was centered on baptism, a physical act that symbolizes purification from sin and newness of life in the Spirit. This focus on purification and transformation is the background for Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Canna.

In John 2:1-5 we see a picture of what Jesus and Mary's relationship looked like through the Wedding in Canna. In Jesus' time, a wedding celebration lasted several days, usually an entire week! Different from our modern ceremonies that celebrate two people coming together, these festivities marked the uniting of two families. For this reason, weddings were huge events, and everyone in the family's local community was invited. A family's honor and social status were at stake based on how many guests attended and how good of a time they had. Running out of wine would have been a serious embarrassment, bringing public shame to the entire family.

The Greek term Jesus used to refer to Mary as "woman" (goo-ney) in verse 4 was uncommon for family, and is never used in Greek or Jewish writings by sons to address their mothers. While it is not derogatory or disrespectful, by using this specific term to talk to Mary, Jesus highlights that He is first and foremost accountable to God the Father rather than His earthly family. This is a central theme we will see throughout John's Gospel.

1. In verse 4 Jesus responded to Mary by saying "*woman, why do you involve me*" and "*My hour has not yet come*". What does Jesus' response tell you about the priorities and timing of His ministry?
2. Mary does not know how Jesus will respond, but she knows that He will do something (v. 5). What can you learn from Mary's faith and boldness?
3. Why do you think it is important that Jesus never used His status as God to distance Himself from his human responsibilities (like obeying His mother)?

In John 2:6-12 Jesus performs his first miracle recorded in John's Gospel. These stone jars were originally used for ceremonial washings (v. 6). Unlike clay, which was more common for drinking and storage vessels, stone did not become ritually unclean. These jars would have been used for guests to wash and become ritually pure before a meal. Their size also suggests the number of guests in attendance was no small number! Jesus chose to fill these ritual cleansing jars with water that would become the wine, not only protecting the family from shame, but also demonstrating that he came to inaugurate something that surpassed all religious expectations.

4. In verse 7 Jesus instructed the servants to fill the empty jars with water. Have you ever been obedient to God at a time when His instructions seemed irrational? What was the result?

5. Hosts traditionally served their finest wines first and saved lower-quality wines after the guests had been drinking. The master of the banquet was surprised that the bridegroom broke custom and served a choice wine at this stage of the party. Where have you seen God act with an extravagance that exceeded your expectations?

6. Verse 11 says that Jesus “revealed His glory” through this miracle. The revelation of God’s glory is a key theme to focus on throughout John. What is the glory of God and why is it so important?

Weekly Challenge: At the wedding Mary noticed a tangible need and responded by asking Jesus to intercede. In light of this, I challenge you to be more aware of the needs around you this week, especially the needs of others. When you notice these needs, pause and pray. Ask Jesus to intercede and then ask God how He might be calling you to help.

John 3 | Jesus' Conversation with Nicodemus

Weekly Reading: John 3

Key Passage: John 3:1-21

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

In John 2 Jesus performed his first miracles in Galilee and then journeyed to Jerusalem for the passover festival. In a deliberate act of righteous judgement Jesus made a whip and cleared the money changes and merchants out of the temple courts. With this act, Jesus' three year ministry began with a bang, and people started to take notice of this "rabbi" from Nazareth. Some saw his miracles and heard his teachings and believed, others outright rejected Him, and a few had genuine questions about who Jesus really was and what he came to do.

John 3:1-15 gives us a window into a secret conversation between a high-ranking Pharisee named Nicodemus and Jesus. The Pharisees were frequently adversaries of Jesus in the Gospels, but this might be because Jesus saw that they were so close to getting it. The word *Pharisee* derives from a Hebrew word meaning "separated" and they were very zealous about following all 600+ laws in the Torah. They were so serious about personal piety that they added laws on top of God's laws just to make sure they were not inadvertently breaking any of them! Nicodemus wasn't just a normal Pharisee but was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the highest religious ruling council. Pharisees were not bad guys, they were actually really good guys. They were the rule followers and upstanding Jewish citizens, but their religiosity caused them to clash with Jesus.

1. In verse 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus we must be born again. This phrase literally means "born from above". What does Jesus mean when he says we must be born again?
2. When we believe in Jesus we become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). This is what it means to be born again - you die to your flesh, are filled with the Holy Spirit, and are transformed. In what ways have you been "born again" and become a new creation in Christ?
3. Jesus references a passage from Numbers 21:6-9 where the Israelites became sick due to their rebellion, but are healed by looking up at the bronze serpent on a pole. How did Jesus use this story, which Nicodemus was familiar with, to reveal his mission?

John 3:16-21 includes one of the most famous verses in the entire Bible, but don't let your familiarity with God's Word dull its power. John leaves no room for confusion after Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus - the motivation for everything Jesus does is love. Jesus' mission is the mission of God Himself, to bring love and life for all who believe.

4. How do verses 16-21 reveal the depth of God's incredible love for us?

5. While this passage is all about God's love we also see condemnation and judgment. How do these seemingly opposite exist side by side in the passage?

John 3:22-36 shifts the focus away from Nicodemus and to John the Baptist. This John is not the same as the author of this Gospel. John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin who led a successful ministry of his own that included having his own disciples and followers who would come out to the countryside to listen to him and be baptized. In John 3 John the Baptist was coming to terms with his new role after Jesus' ministry began and took center stage.

6. What does John say about his role now that Jesus has arrived (Verse 30)? Why is that such a remarkable statement for John to make?

7. John could have been jealous of Jesus and bitter about the followers he was losing to him, but instead John humbly ushered everyone, even his own disciples towards Jesus. How does John's example reveal to you the goal of true discipleship?

Weekly Challenge: When Jesus' ministry began John the Baptist rightly said "He must become greater, and I must become less"? This week I challenge you to memorize this verse and return to it daily whenever you are making decisions big or small. Take note of how this verse changes the lens through which you see your life and make decisions.

John 4 | Jesus' Conversation with the Samaritan

Weekly Reading: John 4

Key Passage: John 4:1-42

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

In John 3, under the cover of night, Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, approached Jesus with questions. Afterward, Jesus and the disciples journeyed to the Judean countryside, where they baptized believers. By the time Jesus departed Judea, many came to recognize that He was the promised Messiah.

In John 4:1-6 Jesus' ministry is on the move as they journey from Judea to Galilee. There were two major routes available, and most opted for the eastern road that went through Jericho before winding north into the Rift Valley. A second, less common route went straight through the hill country toward the Jezreel Valley. Although the second route was more direct, many Jewish people avoided it because it cut through Samaritan territory.

The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans had been deeply hostile for nearly four hundred years. After the Assyrian exile, some Israelites stayed behind and formed families with the foreigners brought in by Assyrian rulers. These people became known as the Samaritans, and they claimed to be the true heirs of God's covenant with Israel. However, the Jewish people who returned from exile and had not intermarried considered themselves to be the faithful remnant. The Jews and the Samaritans developed conflicting views like the proper places for worship, Scripture, and the identity of the Messiah, these issues fueled their ongoing conflict.

1. Verse 4 says that Jesus "had to" go through Samaria. Considering the religious and historical tensions, why do you think this was such an important route for Jesus to take? What does it reveal about who Jesus came to save?
2. There were all kinds of social and religious barriers between Jews and Samaritans. What barriers today make it difficult for you to share the gospel with certain people?

John 4:7-26 tells the story of Jesus talking with the least likely person imaginable, a Samaritan woman.

Jesus broke nearly every social convention by addressing the woman directly at the well. Jewish men did not speak to women in public, especially Samaritan women who occupied the lowest social class and were considered ritually unclean. Most women gathered water in groups during the cool part of the day, but this woman came to the well alone. Many scholars have interpreted her solitude and specific situation as evidence for being a prostitute and social outcast. John is silent about the details of her circumstances but clearly portrayed her as someone whose real wounds have left her spiritually thirsty.

3. In verse 15 the woman asked Jesus for the water so she won't have to keep coming back to the well. Can you think of a time when you asked God for something that you thought you needed, only to realize you were desiring a deeper spiritual need?
4. In verse 21 Jesus challenged the woman's view that worship must happen in a specific place. What do you think it means to "worship in Spirit and in truth" and how does this challenge the way we think of going to church and worship today?

In John 4:27-42 the disciples returned, and found Jesus speaking with the Samaritan woman. Surprised to find Jesus there with her, they did not ask Him why He was speaking to her or what was wanted. Although neither question was voiced, both questions are answered in the story. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman was purposeful and she represents the exact kind of individual Jesus is seeking. One who is broken, but longing for something deeper and open to receiving God's Spirit and truth.

5. In verse 28 the woman left her jar and went back to her town. What is the gospel calling you to abandon with urgency, so that you can serve God's greater will?
6. The Samaritan woman became one of the first evangelists in John's gospel (v. 39). What does her story teach you about the power of personal testimony and the kinds of people God can use to lead others to Christ?

Weekly Challenge: Jesus went out of his way to minister to the Samaritan Woman. This week take note of places Jesus is asking you to serve others. Find these places and then literally go out of your way to love God and love others as Jesus is calling you.

John 5 | Jesus' Conversation with the Lame Man

Weekly Reading: John 5

Key Passage: John 5:1-30

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

John's Gospel is often split up into two sections. The book of signs (ch 1-12) and the book of glory (ch 13-21). The book of signs covers Jesus ministry and miracles while glory covers the events leading up to his crucifixion. The first half is called the book of signs, because that's just what the miracles were - signs pointing to who Jesus was and what his kingdom was all about. The miracles were never just about the miracles themselves. They were not merely magic tricks or God showing off his power, instead they always moved people to faith and belief.

In John 5:1-15 Jesus visits the pool of Bethesda which was known for its supernatural healing qualities. The pool was believed to be visited by a spirit who would heal the sick, so many would gather early in the morning to sit around the pool hoping to be healed. It appears the lame man in John 5 had been ritually attending this pool for years, hoping to touch the waters and be made whole by the spirit.

1. The man Jesus met at the pool had been lame for 38 years. Can you relate to his prolonged struggle in any way?
2. Jesus briefly talks to the man and quickly heals him in verse 8. What did the man do to earn his healing? Is this surprising to you?
3. After healing him, Jesus returned to the lame man and gave him a stern warning to stop sinning or something worse will happen to you. What does Jesus mean and why would he add this command *after* the man is fully healed?
4. The lame man sought out supernatural healing from the waters of Bethesda for decades, but Jesus was the one who finally healed him. In what ways have you overlooked Jesus, and sought other sources (whether material or spiritual) for healing?

John 5:16-18 is one of the first major debates between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees are upset that Jesus would even consider healing a man on the Sabbath. Healing was considered working, and that was not allowed on the Lord's Day. The Pharisees had a choice to make. To obey their man-made tradition or Jesus. They did not realise it, but by choosing their man-made rules they were rebelling against God in human flesh dwelling among them.

5. How do the Pharisees' anger reveal to us the negative spirit of rigid religiosity?

6. Can you think of a time where you were so concerned about man-made rules, tradition, or religion, and that you failed to love like Jesus would?

In John 5:19-30 Jesus defended himself and unpacked what the Sabbath really represented.

The Pharisees were trying to protect the Sabbath with their own rules and regulations, but by doing so missed God standing right in front of them. Jesus can work on the Sabbath because He is God. Jesus actually came to dwell with us, and offer forgiveness that allows us to experience true Sabbath rest. Jesus is teaching all of us that true Sabbath rest is not a day off of work, but the eternal rest that is only found when we put our trust in Jesus. It's only in Christ that we can find the true peace, wholeness, and healing promised on the sabbath.

7. Jesus said, "*I seek not to please myself, but him who sent me*". What does this reveal to us about Jesus' relationship with the Father?

Weekly Challenge: In response to the last question I challenge you to make practical tweaks to your life that help you please God rather than yourself this week. Maybe you can re-evaluate the way you spend money or time on certain forms of entertainment. I challenge you to make one change this week, and share the impact it made at your next meeting.

John 6 | “I Am the Bread of Life”

Weekly Reading: John 6

Key Passage: John 6:25-69

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

A large crowd had followed Jesus after He crossed the Sea of Galilee because of all of the miracles he had been performing. Bluntly put, they wanted Jesus for what he could do for them. When the people gathered to hear Him speak, Jesus fed over 5,000 people with a small lunch from a boy of only five loaves of bread and two fishes. The crowd was so impressed they tried to take Jesus by force to make him king, but Jesus escaped to a mountain to be alone. Later, the disciples set out in a boat and they encountered a strong storm. Jesus walked on the water toward the boat, and calmed the storm. After both these remarkable miracles Jesus gave one of his most divisive teachings to the crowds.

John 6:25-40 starts with a question from the crowd that we have all asked, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” This is a universal question that is as relevant to 1st century Jews as it is to 21st century Houston inner-loopers. Life built on effort and achievement is often the easiest for us to understand, and the crowd thought God’s work operated the same way. Jesus redirected their understanding of work by reminding the crowd of Israel’s wanderings. When Israel journeyed through the wilderness (Exodus 16 & Numbers 11), God provided manna from heaven each morning. The Israelites were instructed to collect only what was needed for the day and those who attempted to stockpile discovered their bread had rotted, contaminating the entire camp with a stench. The Israelite’s real work was not in gathering. And our work is not in “doing”, it is in the daily belief that God will provide. The work is to believe in the One He has sent. In John 6:15 Jesus continues to reveal Himself through the seven powerful “I am” statements which shape his ministry and escalate tensions with the Pharisees.

1. Jesus talks about two kinds of food, the kind that spoils and the kind that endure (v. 27). What do you think both kinds of food look like in your life, and do you struggle to distinguish between the two?
2. In verses 32-33 Jesus clarified that it was not Moses who gave the bread to the Israelites, it was God. How does this change your perspective on where your provision comes from?

John 6:41-66 contains one of Jesus' most provocative teachings, one that lost him many of his followers.

In verse 35 we see the first “I Am” statement where Jesus says “I Am the bread of life”.

Not only is He the bread, He then told His followers that they must “eat His flesh and drink His blood” in order to have eternal life! In Israelite life, the idea of eating human flesh and drinking blood was unthinkable, even forbidden (Leviticus 17:12). Unlike the manna, which could be picked up and physically eaten, Jesus' bread is spiritual and relational. To “eat” His bread is to believe in Him, depend on Him, and participate in an ongoing relationship with Jesus.

3. In verses 41-42 the people are grumbling about Jesus' teachings because they were unusual and kind of strange. How do people cite similar complaints about Jesus or the church today?
4. The crowds ultimately turned on Jesus because He was not the messiah they expected him to be. They wanted a king like David to rule and defeat the Romans. In what ways do we also resist Truth when it does not fit our narrative?
5. Jesus says “No one can come, unless the Father has enabled them”. How do you navigate the tension in evangelism of wanting others to believe, but knowing that their relationship with God isn't something you can control through your own efforts?
6. Verse 66 says many disciples deserted Jesus after this teaching, yet the 12 stuck by his side. What is the key difference between a true disciple and one who walks away? In other words, why do some walk away when things get difficult and confusing, and why do others stay?

Weekly Challenge: Choose one passage from John 6 to memorize and “chew” on this week. Ask God to show you how His Word can sustain and guide you throughout your week. At your next meeting share the passage you chose and what difference it made over the past week.

John 7-8 | “I Am the Light of the World”

Weekly Reading: John 7-9:5

Key Passage: John 8:1-20, 9:1-5

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

After Jesus' teaching on the bread of life in John 6 many of his followers deserted him, but the 12 stuck with Jesus. In chapter 7 Jesus heads to Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles. Once again Jesus' teaching causes division, even among his own family. Some in the crowds even say he is demon-possessed! Even though the Jewish leaders knew the Scripture perfectly, they were blind and unable to see the light of the world standing among them.

John 8:1-11 features a famous story only found in John where the Jewish leaders attempt to trap Jesus with a woman caught in adultery. The Pharisees knew Jesus was compassionate and was often seen with sinners, so they brought a woman convicted of adultery to test him. Leviticus 20:10 says technically both the man and women could be stoned for their sin, but the Pharisees only brought the women forward. The Pharisees' concern was not really preserving the law, but humiliating Jesus. Either way, this woman was caught red handed. Her sin was a clear violation of the law of Moses and she deserved death. The parishes trapped Jesus and wanted to see what he would do.

1. Jesus did not ignore the woman's sin or imply that following God's laws doesn't matter. How does Jesus' response invite you to rethink the idea that grace comes at the expense of God's standards?
2. Jesus' words "*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her*" are some of the most quoted in the Bible. How do people outside of the church or even within it misuse or misunderstand this verse?
3. How do Jesus' words in verse 11 serve as an important conclusion to this conversation?

In John 8:11- 29 Jesus said “I am the light of the world”, the second of seven “I Am”

statements. John calls Jesus the light 22 times across the Gospel. This is an image rich with messianic meaning and Old Testament significance. John is not just talking about the light that sparked creation back in Genesis 1, but the light that still shines bright today illuminating the darkness.

4. The imagery of light is featured frequently in the Old Testament. Check out Isaiah 49:6 and Psalm 27:1. What is the mission of the light of Christ?

In John 8:31-48 the debate with the Pharisees continued as they discussed what forgiveness

of sins truly means. We often think of forgiveness as just an emotional release, but the Bible talks about forgiveness in very real, concrete ways. Forgiveness is described as a burden that is lifted, or a debt that is paid. When Jesus says the Pharisees are slaves to sin, this is not a metaphor, but describes a real form of spiritual bondage. In the same way sin has a very real cost, and Jesus' blood must be shed (Hebrews 9:22) for us to experience freedom. Jesus provides a serious warning to the Pharisees and us: We all serve a master, either Christ or sin.

5. How have you witnessed or experienced the real physical bondage we can have to sin?
6. The most dangerous master is one we are ignorant of. What does it look like when people are so blinded by their sin that they are unaware of its hold on their life?
7. John 8:36 says “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Where do you need to experience the freedom of Christ this week?

Weekly Challenge: As we enter the season of lent, take time this week to let God examine your heart. Pray through Psalm 139:23-24, and let God point out ways you are in bondage to sin or have failed to love God and others as you ought to.

John 9-10 | “I Am the Gate” & “I Am the Shepherd”

Weekly Reading: John 9-10

Key Passage: John 10:1-21

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

In John chapter 8 Jesus said “I am the light of the world,” inviting and challenging people to see Him as the one true source of life. Jesus’ words stirred conflict between Himself and the religious leaders who continued to resist His authority. By the end of the chapter, Jesus went even further, and identified Himself as the “I Am,” the very name God revealed to Moses in the Exodus. (Ex 3:14) This claim enraged the leaders, who saw it as an offense worthy of death.

In John 10:1-10 Jesus says “I am the gate” (John 10:7), the third of seven “I Am” statements in the gospel of John. Shepherding was a prominent occupation in the ancient world and His audience would have immediately recognized His gate metaphor. At night, sheep would be kept inside simple enclosures built with low stone walls and a single entrance. By identifying Himself as the “gate,” Jesus conveyed that He alone was the only legitimate access into God’s personal care and eternal life..

1. Christianity is both inclusive and exclusive. It's inclusive because everyone gets an invitation. It's exclusive because the *only way in* is through Jesus. Why is the fact that Jesus is the only way such a controversial claim?
2. Many people, religions, or new age spiritual practices will claim to provide us access to God. How can we discern whether these “gates” are from God or something else entirely?
3. In verse 7 Jesus said “I am the gate for the sheep,” what does this add to your understanding of Jesus when you consider His earlier “I Am” statements in John: “I am the bread of life” (6:35) and “I am the light of the world? (8:12)?

John 10:11-21 contains the fourth “I Am” statement, “I Am the good shepherd”. This is a title loaded with Old Testament significance. Shepherd imagery was common in Israel, representing leaders, kings, and sometimes even God Himself. The prophets, however, often condemned Israel's religious and political leaders, for neglecting their “flocks” (i.e. the people). God had promised a good shepherd would come to guide, protect and gather His people.

Picking up on another prophetic tradition, Jesus' fourth statement expressed a radical expansion of the flock beyond the borders of Israel. In verse 16 He said that there are “other sheep not of this fold”, drawing on God's promise in Ezekiel 37 to bring the nations under His care. Jesus is both the gate and the shepherd, the one who provides exclusive access to God's care and protection. As the gate, He is the only legitimate entryway into life and safety; as the shepherd, He personally sacrifices Himself for those under His care.

4. Hired hands made small wages, were not personally invested in the herds and were known to abandon their responsibilities when things got difficult. In contrast, Jesus is the true shepherd who has come to lay down his own life for His sheep. How does this “I am” statement help you better understand Jesus' personal investment in your life?
5. Verse 16 says that there are other sheep that will be gathered by the shepherd. Read Ezekiel 34:11-16. Who are these other sheep that are included in God's plan of salvation?
6. Why do you think the inclusivity of Jesus caused so much division among the religious (v. 19)?

Weekly Challenge: To know and hear the shepherd's voice often requires silence. This week, spend five to ten minutes each day in silence after reading a short passage of Scripture, and ask: “Jesus, you are my Shepherd, how do you want to lead me?” Reflect on what you hear this week and share with your group.

John 11-12 | “I am the Resurrection”

Weekly Reading: John 11-12

Key Passage: John 11:1-44

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

Life and death have been central themes throughout the Gospel of John. John wrote in the first chapter, Jesus “was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 1:4). And throughout His ministry, Jesus repeatedly addressed death through teachings on spiritual blindness, sin and eternal separation from God. But for the first time in the Gospel, Jesus will confront physical death face to face through Lazarus.

John 11:1-16 teaches us about God's perfect timing. When Jesus received word that Lazarus was sick, He waited two days before departing for Bethany. When we face loss and uncertainty in our lives, we assume a delay in response is a result of indifference. We create mental timelines for how and when Jesus should intervene in our lives, and become jaded when He diverts from our plans. But John is clear that Jesus' timing was intentional. He does not always meet our limited expectations of Him, in timing or in outcome, but that does not mean that He is absent in our lives or acting with cruelty in our suffering. Jesus' delayed response to Lazarus was not neglect or abandonment, his timing was designed to bring glory to God (v. 4). Even so, many of us can feel hurt, confused, or disappointed by God's timing or perceived silence.

The disciples hesitated returning to Judea because Jesus had almost died the last time He was there (John 10:31-39). But Jesus' response in verse 9 reframes the problem of the whole story. The problem was not the Jewish people, or their threats on His life. The problem was not even the death of Lazarus. The problem is the darkness in the world that causes people to stumble. And the solution is the light. Even in seasons of loss, and times when we can't see what lies ahead, there is no reason to fear the darkness when we put our faith in the Light.

1. Verses 5-6 tell us that Jesus loved Mary and Martha, and then chose to wait two days before leaving. Where are you currently waiting on God, and how does this passage challenge the idea that His delayed timing means He doesn't love you or care?
2. The disciples are afraid to return to Judea (v. 8). How has fear made you resistant to God's timing, even when He was clearly leading you?
3. In verses 14-15 Jesus said that Lazarus' death occurred so the disciples may believe. Why do you think belief often comes out of waiting or loss instead of God immediately fixing our problem?

John 11:17-37 contains the fifth of Jesus's seven "I am" Statements. In ancient Jewish thought, a person's soul did not depart from their body until three days after death. By arriving on the fourth day, Jesus made it unmistakably clear that Lazarus was dead, really dead, dead-dead! This was not some contrived trick or a misunderstanding about Lazarus' being asleep. Only Jesus truly has the power to bring life back from the dead and light to all who believe.

4. If you read the conversation between Martha and Jesus very carefully you will see Martha's response was filled with both doubt and faith. How can recognizing that faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive strengthen your relationship with Jesus?

5. Verse 35 is known for being the shortest verse in the Bible. Compare this to Hebrews 4:15. What does this show you about how Jesus relates to our pain and suffering?

John 11:38-44 features a miracle found only in John, yet one of the most dramatic in the Gospels. In the first century, the dead were wrapped strips of linen that served as a burial cloth. Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave, still bound by the physical evidence of his death and then instructed to remove them in the restoration of his life. Just like Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, Jesus calls to us, and invites us to remove our burial garments, so that we may believe and experience the new life He offers.

6. Jesus prayed to the Father, saying, "*I know that you always hear me...*" How does His prayer show His intercession is for the benefit of others? What is the benefit (v. 42)?

7. Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, confronting death and restoring life and told the bystanders to "*take off the grave clothes and let him go*". What grave clothes is Jesus asking you to remove today?

Weekly Challenge: Jesus could handle Mary's doubts and he can handle yours as well. This week I challenge you to journal and bring all your doubts to Jesus. Don't hold anything back, trust him with your deepest doubts and give them over to him in prayer.

John 13 | Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet

Weekly Reading: John 13

Key Passage: John 13:1-12

This is an individual lesson for you to complete while groups take off for Spring Break.

John 13 begins the passion narrative in John Gospels. The term simply means the events directly leading to Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. While all four gospels discuss these events John gives us much greater insight, to what Jesus said around the table at the last supper.

John 13:1-17 features an uncomfortable scene that kicks off this famous meal. Jesus, who is God incarnate, bent down and washed his disciple's filthy feet. If that doesn't feel uncomfortable to you, you might not fully understand who Jesus is! Jesus was not only a teacher, but the Messiah. He is God, our creator, sustainer, and savior. We serve him, why should he serve us? This is why Peter was initially so upset. How could the disciples deserve such a service from the eternal God in human flesh?

Jesus knew they would be confused, but He wanted his disciples to know that no one is too good to serve others and everyone deserves to be served. If Jesus can lower himself and serve others, we have no excuse. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 20:28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Think about the people Jesus was serving. Sure they were his disciples, his closest friends, but also they ones who would betray him. All of these men would turn their back on him and desert him in his more dire moment. Jesus even washed Judas' feet, the man who had already sold him for a few silver coins. Religion in almost all contexts boils down to this - "what can I do for God?" In this passage Jesus bends down and shows us what God has done for us.

1. Who are people you struggle to serve? What gets in the way of you showing the same humility as Christ?
2. Where have you felt undeserving of God's love or attention in your life?
3. What does this passage teach you about what God's love for you looks like?

Weekly Challenge: This week go out of your way to serve someone else. Do not settle for serving in a way that comes easy. Make your service uncomfortable, and serve someone in a way that you might think you are too good for.

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John 14 | Jesus Promises A Helper

Weekly Reading: John 14

Key Passage: John 14:15-31

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

In John 13 the narrative slows down, while other chapters have spanned several years of His ministry, the next few chapters concentrate on the single night Jesus was betrayed, denied and arrested. In these last moments with the disciples, Jesus taught them and prepared them for his coming death. In chapter 14 Jesus continued this teaching, promising the Spirit to guide and comfort them after He is gone. Throughout the next few chapters notice how Jesus gives both words of comfort and warning to his disciples.

John 14:15-21 is framed by a clear call to obedience. Jesus says that we love Him by keeping His commands (vv. 15 & 21). Loving Jesus is inseparable from being obedient to God's Word. What God had spoken in the past to the Israelites remains relevant, not just for the disciples but also for us today. This obedience is not legalistic, but the exact means by which we grow in relationship with Jesus, because obedience is worship.

Central to this command was the promise of the "Paraclete" which is a unique term used in John's writing to describe a particular function of the Holy Spirit as a helper, advocate and comforter. God's Spirit has been at work since the beginning of time, in these verses Jesus introduced how the Spirit would operate in a new way through the disciples and guide them into truth. The Holy Spirit is often underplayed because He seems so mysterious to us. But He is a person of the Trinity, fully God, fully Jesus, but also distinct. The Spirit is who we have in our walk after the cross, to guide, teach, and comfort us.

1. In John 14:6 Jesus described Himself as "the truth" and in 14:17 He said the Spirit was "*the Spirit of Truth*". Why do you think it is important that Jesus and the Spirit have this shared identity?
2. Jesus said He would not leave His followers as orphans. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus will never abandon you?
3. In verse 18 Jesus told the disciples "*I am coming to you*". Considering that Jesus was already present when He said that, what do you think He meant by this promise?

John 14:22-31 begins with a question from the disciples about how Jesus will be revealed to the rest of the world. In response to the question, Jesus returned to the importance of obedience, reminding the disciples that the gospel is not sentimental. The gospel carries real physical and spiritual consequences. The world, influenced by Satan - “the prince of this world” will resist the message of Jesus, which is why obedience is so important.

Obedience is not about following rules or a religious checklist, it requires listening and submission to the Spirit. Jesus offered three promises that the Spirit would bring: guidance in truth (v. 27), peace during hardship (v. 28), and the ongoing comfort of His presence (v. 28). These assurances would prove crucial for the disciples when they were left to witness Jesus’ crucifixion. From their vantage point, the cross would have appeared like Satan’s victory, but Jesus knew the cross would be Satan’s defeat. Obedience to the Spirit is how the disciples and us are able to discern truth from lies and reveal the truth of Jesus to the rest of the world.

4. In verse 26 Jesus said the Spirit will “teach you” and “remind you” of His truth. Where have you experienced the guidance and direction of the Spirit in your walk with Christ?

5. Read Isaiah 26:3. What does it mean to receive the peace of Jesus (v. 27)? How is it different from the way the world thinks of peace?

6. Jesus was obedient to the Father because He loves Him. What motivates your obedience, love or religious obligation?

Weekly Challenge: This week, spend time in prayer specifically asking the Spirit to guide you in the truth of Jesus. Pay attention to moments where you feel the prompting of the Spirit throughout the week and share one example with the group when you recognized His guidance and the impact of your obedience.

John 15 | Jesus Invites Us to Abide

Weekly Reading: John 15

Key Passage: John 15:1-17

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? Pastorally this is one of the most frequent questions I receive. We know what it means to believe in Jesus and begin to surrender ourselves to him, but what does it mean to abide in him daily with all the chaos, darkness, or even just busyness swirling around us? We will unpack this question in this lesson, but to state it simply to abide means to remain in Christ as your source of life, love, and joy,

John 15:1-17 shows us what it looks like to abide in Christ. It's important to remember that Jesus is not teaching this lesson to a bunch of people who were safe and comfortable.. This message is for his followers who are about to be scattered, persecuted, and even killed. Abiding has nothing to do with external factors going on around us, we can abide no matter the season or circumstances. This is great news for us! We do not have to become a pastor, monk, or nun to rest in Jesus. We can find our lives hidden within him even in the monotony of everyday life.

1. What do each of these terms represent in this teaching:

Vine -

Branches -

Gardener -

Fruit -

Fire -

2. Jesus says the father is like a gardner who will cut off and prune branches. While this might be painful at the moment, pruning is done with an eye towards future fruitfulness. How has the Lord cut things out of your life that then allowed you to flourish?
3. How does Jesus define love in verse 12-14. How does this challenge the way we think about love and bearing fruit?

John 15:18-27 moves from comfort to a warning! The entire passion narrative fluctuates between these two sentiments, comfort and then warning. We need both of these reminders. Sometimes we need comfort when life gets crazy and we are surrounded by fear and death, and other times we need a warning when we get too complacent and desensitized to sin.

4. Christians often act surprised when faced with persecution, despite the fact that Jesus warned his disciples it was coming. Why do you think so many christians are still caught off guard when they face persecution?
5. Jesus quotes from Psalm 69:4, "*Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me.*" How do these passages influence the way we respond to the world's hostility towards Jesus and his followers?
6. How do verses 26-27 provide hope to a persecuted church, In light of John 15 how should believers face persecution from the world

Weekly Challenge: The church around the globe is facing heavy persecution. Whether it's the Middle East, Northern Africa, or parts of Asia there are Christians being ostracized, imprisoned, and killed for their faith in Jesus. Spend time this week looking up one group of persecuted christians, and dedicate time to pray for them daily.

John 16-17 | Jesus Transforms Grief to Joy

Weekly Reading: John 16-17

Key Passage: John 16:1-33

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

In John 16 and 17 the Last Supper comes to a close and Jesus gives his parting words to his disciples. This was the last conversation He would have with many of them before His crucifixion. He wanted to prepare them for what was to come over the next 24 hours, but more importantly give them a vision of the hope that was coming.

In John 16:1-26 Jesus prepared the disciples for the grief they would soon face. Grief is heavy, exhausting, and a powerfully disrupting emotion. The disciples were about to experience the deepest grief they would know watching the crucifixion and witnessing the death of Jesus. In this passage, Jesus warned the disciples grief could make them confused and even cause them to abandon their faith. We've all experienced grief that was overwhelming, and caused us to question God, but Jesus' words bring encouragement not to withdraw but to cling to the faith and seek the help of the Spirit.

1. Have you ever experienced a grief so deep it made you question your faith? What kinds of questions tend to dominate your thoughts and prayer?
2. Jesus says that His departure will allow the Spirit to work in a new way (v. 7). Why must Jesus leave in order for the Spirit to come?
3. How does verses 13-14 help you discern the work of the Spirit? How can you use this test to discern the Spirit's voice in your own life?
4. John 16:23 is one of the most frequently misused verses in Scripture. Some use it to treat God like a genie, using prayer as a mechanism to get whatever we want. In the context of John 16 what do you think Jesus is really teaching us about prayer?

John 17:1-26 is a powerful prayer over the 12 disciples and also over us! Jesus knows His time is up, but he prays a special protection and blessing over his disciples, and then for all of those who would come to believe. This entire prayer shows us the close relationship between God the Father, and God the Son. They are not in competition, but working together for the glory of God. Jesus' mission was to reveal the father and bring eternal life to all people. The 12 have received it, and now as Jesus departs others will come to believe through the mission of the 12.

5. In Verses 1-5 Jesus defines eternal life. How does this eternal life compare to the "eternal life" the world chases?
6. Jesus thanks the Father for giving him the disciples for a time, but before his death he asks for the Fathers' protection over them. How does Jesus' prayer expand our view of stewardship and discipleship?
7. Pay special attention to verses 13-23. List out the specific things Jesus prays over us. How does this prayer reinforce or challenge the prayers you usually pray?

Weekly Challenge: On Holy Week take a moment to lift the hood and untangle some of the grief hidden in your heart. It could be from loss, unmet expectations, or broken promises. Discover it, give it to Jesus, and trust Him to take it and transform it to joy.

We invite you to join us at our Good Friday service as we walk through John 18-19 which covers Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

John 20 | He is Risen!

Weekly Reading: John 19-20

Key Passage: John 20:11-23

This is an individual lesson for you to complete while groups take off for Easter.

John 19 described the darkest day of human history. Jesus, Son of God was crucified. He took on the worst pain imaginable to pay the price for our sin, but in John 20 we discover the best news ever. Even though we deserve this type of death due to our sin, we are forgiven and offered eternal life! **This is the great exchange - Jesus took what we deserved on the cross, and we are given what he earned through Jesus.**

Before the sun rose early on Easter morning Mary Magdalene was shocked to discover the empty tomb. She ran and told the disciples and as soon as the men heard the news they raced to the tomb. John, who is clearly very proud of his fleet feet, gets there first and finds that Mary was telling the truth. They were not initially filled with joy, but filled with more questions. So they walked back to the place they were hiding more confused than before.

Only Mary Magdalene remains, and through her tears she sees a man whom she mistakes for a gardner. He asks her “who are you looking for” and she explains that Jesus’ body has been stolen. Then the gardner says her name, “Mary”, and she instantly realizes she is talking to the resurrected Jesus! She cries out in joy, and then Mary immediately becomes the first evangelist. She joyfully carries the good news that Jesus is back to his disciples!

1. As soon as Mary heard Jesus say her name, she realized who she was talking to and everything became clear. Was there a time in your life when you felt like Jesus called your name and everything started to click in your faith?
2. Mary didn’t keep this news to herself, but ran to tell Jesus’ disciples. Do you have that same joy and zeal when it comes to sharing the good news? Why or what not?
3. The first thing Jesus says to his disciple is “Peace be with you”. Where do you need the peace of Christ in your life? How can Easter help bring that to you?

Weekly Challenge: This week the challenge is very simple, yet could be incredibly difficult for you. Here it is - share the gospel! Invite a friend or family member to lunch, sit down with them, and share the good news that Jesus has defeated death and we can too. Lead with honesty and your own story explaining how you have experienced this great exchange! Use this blank page below to write and pray over names or write out a version of your testimony to share!

John 21 | Peter's Redemption

Weekly Reading: John 21

Key Passage: John 21

Begin this week's group discussion by following up on last week's challenge.

In John 18, Peter denied Jesus three times, leaving him ashamed and questioning his worthiness as a disciple. Even after the resurrection, the disciples were unsure about how to move forward, and had begun to return to their former jobs. In this chapter, Jesus will address Peter's denial, offer personal restoration, and provide encouragement to continue to pursue the call of service in all of their lives.

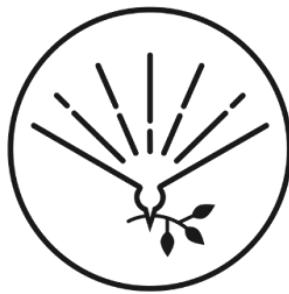
John 21:1-14 shows us how hard Peter took his denial of Christ. At the beginning of this passage, Peter is not considered a disciple, and explicitly separated from the group in verse 2. After a long and unsuccessful night of fishing, the men encountered the risen Jesus for the third time. As He called to them from the shore, Peter immediately jumped into the water and swam to Jesus, meeting him by a charcoal fire. The word for charcoal fire is only used one other time in the Gospel of John, to describe the fire where Peter warmed himself when he denied Jesus on the night of His arrest. In this passage, Jesus uses the memory of the fire to transform Peter's failure and betrayal into his restoration and reinstating his role as one of the core disciples who would go on to grow the church.

1. Compare verse 2 to earlier descriptions of Peter in the Gospel of John (1:424 6:68-69; 13:37). What has changed and why does John present him this way?
2. Despite denying Jesus, Peter responded to recognizing Jesus by immediately jumping into the water and swimming toward him. How do you respond to Jesus after you've failed?
3. In verse 6 Jesus told the disciples to cast the net to the other side of the boat, recreating Peter's original calling from Luke 5:1-11. Where in your own life is God offering you another chance at something so you can experience redemption?
4. Meals have played a central role throughout the Gospel of John. How does Jesus' meal with Peter in this passage reflect His identity as the "Bread of Life" and Jesus' desire and commitment to sustain those who follow Him?

John 21:15-25 concludes John's Gospel with a beautiful story of grace and redemption. The dialogue between Jesus and Peter is marked by the repetition of the question "Do you love me?" and the statement "Feed my sheep". There are three different words for love in the Greek, two are used in this passage. Twice, Jesus asked Peter for agape, which is the perfect love that God has for His people. Peter responded with phileo, which is a brotherly love or affection. Peter was unable to claim the full, sacrificial love that Jesus asked Him for. On the third question, Jesus met Peter where he was and asked for his phileo love. Jesus always meets us where we are, filling the gaps in our love. Even when our love is incomplete, His is perfect and He continues to invite us to follow Him, never abandoning His call on your life.

5. Why do you think Jesus repeated the question and the command three times? How does this reflect the process of discipleship?
6. How does the persistence of Jesus' call to "Feed my sheep" demonstrate His desire for us to participate in His mission, even when our love is imperfect?
7. The Bible does not record every miracle or teaching of Jesus (20:30-31). John only included the ones that were most important to help us believe Jesus is the Messiah. Which miracle, teaching or story, from John's Gospel has deepened your faith the most and why?

Weekly Challenge: This passage teaches us that Peter did not have to prove himself to get back in Jesus' good graces, he only had to respond to the love that he had given him. This week, notice one way you've been trying to earn God's approval. Consider what it looks like to respond by receiving His love first and discerning how that should change your daily actions.



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