



John 1 – 12

Light the dark

Leaders' notes and sample studies

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Background notes

This booklet includes 21 study guides with sample questions from the Gospel According to John (focusing on chapters 1– 12).

After a really positive opening in chapters 1 – 4 of John’s Gospel where the person and work of Jesus is outlined, things turn decidedly darker in chapters 5 – 12. Jesus is challenged by his opponents – the Jews – as to whether his claims are correct. He in turn challenges his opponents as to whether they have understood who he is and what he came to do.

In chapters 5 – 7 we see a build up of action as Jesus moves closer to Jerusalem and his crucifixion. There is much dialogue about who he is and what he came to do.

- Chapter 5 gives a deeper insight into who Jesus is.
- Chapter 6 gives a deeper insight into what he came to do.
- Chapter 7 records the controversy that raged and still rages today about Jesus.

In chapters 8 – 12 different reactions to Jesus’ signs come to a head in a dispute between Jesus and the Jewish leaders over who Jesus is.

An interesting motif throughout this part of John’s Gospel is the seven signs, in which Jesus reveals his glory.

1. Water into wine (John 2)
2. Healing of the royal official’s son (John 4)
3. Healing of the paralytic (John 5)
4. Feeding the 5000 (John 6)
5. Walking on water (John 6)
6. Healing the blind man (John 9)
7. Raising Lazarus (John 11)

How these sample studies work

- The first couple of questions in *Getting started* raise some general issues to think about.
- *Observation* is about getting the detail – reading the passage and seeing what it is about. *Interpretation* aims to take you to some issues in and behind the passage – to help us to think at a little more depth. Sometimes *Observation* and *Interpretation* are combined in the form of interviews, role plays, questions, charts, etc.
- *Implications* seeks to help us think about applying this section of Scripture.
- Each study finishes with suggestions for prayer.

For Your Information will provide a little background to some verses with some additional references to look up from time to time. There will also occasionally be a section called **Did You Notice?** which will also make some comments on various verses and themes.

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1. John 1:1-18

Bill Salier

Getting started

When people want to know about God where will they go to find out – what people, experiences etc?

Where would you advise people to look, and listen if they wanted to find out about God?

Observation

1. According to verse 1&2 what is the relationship between God and the word?
2. According to verses 3-4 what is the word responsible for?
3. What was John's role according to verses 6-9?
4. According to verses 5,10-11 what is the relationship between the word and the world?
5. How does one become a child of God according to verses 12-13?
6. According to verse 14 what did the word do and what did this mean?
7. Who is the word?
8. According to verse 18 what are the consequences of the word, Jesus Christ, becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us?

For your information

The 'word' or 'logos' as John uses it in John 1:1 would have been a significant 'title' for both Jews and Greeks. For Jews it would have reminded them about God's activity in the Old Testament - God works through his word - in creating etc.

Greeks saw the 'word' or 'logos' as the organising principle of the universe, it was the logos that gave order to everything.

Both Jews and Greeks would have been shocked to think that the word became flesh.

In verse 14 John uses language which has its background in Exodus 34 and 40 – God shows Moses his glory and makes his dwelling with Israel in a tent – the word John uses for dwelling literally means 'pitched his tent' amongst us.

Interpretation

1. Why do you think it took John so long to say that Jesus was the word?
2. From what you know of John's gospel why do you think John has written 1:1-18? How does this passage 'set up' the rest of the gospel?
3. Who do you think the 'we' are mentioned in v 14?
4. What are the benefits of Jesus coming into the world?
5. What are the implications of this passage for those who want to say that Jesus is one of many ways/people to knowing God?

Implications

1. "If anyone tries to talk about what God is like and does not refer to Jesus Christ then they can be ignored as not really knowing what they are talking about. It may be interesting but ultimately futile."

How do you respond to this statement? What are the implications of John 1:1-18 for the truth claims of other religions and philosophies that claim to speak about God?

2. How would you explain to someone what it means to receive, to believe in the name of Jesus?

Prayer suggestions

- Thank God for sending Jesus to accurately reveal who he really is
- Ask that we might better understand how Jesus can be both identical to and distinct from God
- Ask that God will help us to receive Jesus and to believe in his name, living this out in our daily lives

2. John 1:19-34

Bill Salier

Getting started

What do you know about John the Baptist?

What was his role in the story of Jesus?

Observation

1. What do we know already about the role of John from John 1:1-18?
2. What three people does John say that he is not first of all?
3. Who does John say he is (verse 23)?
4. What is John's explanation of his purpose in coming to Israel?
5. How did John know that Jesus was the one he was to announce?
6. Read 3:27-30. What is John's attitude to his role in announcing Jesus?
7. According to 3:31-36 why can Jesus be trusted as telling the truth when he speaks about God?
8. Also according to these verse what are the consequences of accepting and believing Jesus? What happens if you do not accept Jesus?

For your information

The Christ (v 20) was the long expected saviour of Israel who would bring in the final, triumphant rule of God and his people. Elijah (v 21) was an Old Testament prophet who was expected to appear on Earth in advance of the coming of the Christ, while the Prophet (v 21) refers to a figure promised by Moses in Deut 18:17)

It is not clear what John the Baptist meant when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. It could mean that he thought Jesus was the Lamb of God of certain Jewish writings who was a fierce warrior who would 'take away the sins of the world' in judgement (cf Revelation 5:8, 7:9-10).

Of course as the gospel goes on we see more clearly what it means for Jesus to be the lamb of God - see Exodus 12 and Isa 53 for some background.

Interpretation

1. What is the role of John the Baptist in the plans of God?
2. How will the Lamb of God take away the sin of the world?
3. What does it mean when it says that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit?

(Hint – read Ezekiel 36:24-27, Joel 2:28-32 & Acts 2:1-21)

4. What sort of a person do you think John the Baptist was based on these passages of Scripture?

Implications

1. One of the key words of John's gospel is witness or testimony (see 1:32). From what you have seen of John the Baptist what constitutes a good witness to Jesus? What sort of testimony to Jesus do you bear? What are the situations you have opportunity to bear witness to Jesus?
2. What sort of attitude does John the Baptist display in 3:31 onwards? What does a person need to know in order to be this humble? In what situations do you find difficult to be humble?

Prayer suggestions

- Thank God for the faithful testimony of John the Baptist in his plan to save the world.
- Ask that God might give us opportunity to bear witness to Jesus and that we might be faithful as we do so.
- Ask God to humble us so that we can see ourselves rightly in relationship to God and to other people.

3. John 1:35-51

Bill Salier

Getting started

See if you can name ten different titles for Jesus mentioned in the New Testament.

If someone asked you why they should consider following Jesus what would you say to them?

Observation

Notice how this passage begins with John still performing his role as a witness to Jesus.

1. What is the consequence of John bearing witness to Jesus in verses 35-6?
2. What do the two fellows call Jesus when they first speak to him?
3. What is the first thing that Andrew does after hearing Jesus speak?
4. What does Philip do when he follows Jesus?
5. Who does he refer to Jesus as in verse 45?
6. Why does Nathanael have trouble believing Philip?
7. Why does Nathanael believe in Jesus?
8. What titles does Nathanael give to Jesus?
9. What are the even greater things that Nathanael will go on to see?

For Your Information

The background to 1:47-51 is found in the story of Jacob in the Old Testament. Jacob is described as a deceitful or guileful one in Gen 27:35. Nathanael is not like Jacob – one translation of this verse runs “An Israelite in whom there is no Jacob” – Nathanael was all that an Israelite should be and he recognises Jesus as the King of Israel.

The heavens being opened also has its background in a Jacob story – see Gen 28:10-22.

Interpretation

1. Why do you think John has gone into such detail and told this story the way that he has?
2. What sort of an impression do you have of Jesus at the end of chapter 1?
3. What do you think it means for the heavens to open and for angels to ascend/descend etc?

Implications

1. Notice that each person in the chapter that bears witness bears witness to their testimony to Jesus. If someone asked you for your testimony to Jesus what would you say – how would you explain his significance?

2. The disciples could say ‘come and see’ to the people that they talked to about Jesus – in the light of v 51 in what sense can we still say come and see to those who inquire after Jesus?

Prayer suggestions

- Thank God that he has chosen to reveal himself in Jesus, he Son of Man
- Ask God to help us to catch the biggest possible view of Jesus
- Ask God to help us to be clear and accurate in our testimony to Jesus.

4. John 2:1-11

Bill Salier

Getting started

What difference does it make to your life being a Christian?

What changes have you had to make to your lifestyle and attitudes because of your allegiance to Christ?

Observation

1. Why was Jesus at the wedding?
2. What do you think of Jesus' reply to his mother in verse 4? What 'time' do you think he is referring to?
3. What kind of jars was the water contained in?
4. Who knew about this miracle?
5. What was the quality of the wine like?
6. What was the disciples' response to this miracle?

For Your Information

Running out of wine at a gathering like this constituted a major social embarrassment – there is even the possibility that the groom could have been sued for this happening.

Jesus' address of his mother is simply the word "woman" – it sounds a little more harsh to our ears than it perhaps was though it is certainly a formal and 'distancing' form of address for a son to address his mother.

Notice also that Mary is not named throughout the story – there is no attempt to draw attention to her and she is in no way the 'master' of her son as some varieties of theology that venerate Mary would suggest.

Interpretation

1. What is the significance of the third day do you think? (think of other third days in the Christian story, and also check back through 1:29 and following to count the days)

2. What effect do you think Jesus' reply to Mary in verse 4 would have on her – what would she have been caused to consider?

3. How would you classify or describe this miracle?

4. What do you think is the significance of the fact that it was Jewish ceremonial jars that were used to hold the water?

5. This is the first of Jesus' miracles, in some ways the 'basic' miracle – what does it tell us about Jesus' mission and its effects?

Implications

How do you see your relationship to Jesus? Are there things that you might be tempted to 'trade on', that mean Jesus 'has to' favour you?

The old structures of Judaism had to be transformed to receive the good news of Jesus. What old structures, ways of thinking about life, religion, pleasing God might you need to rethink in the light of Jesus' coming?

Did you notice?

The abundant quantity and quality of the wine that Jesus created is remarked upon in this account – while not the main point it shows that what Jesus will do will be of the highest quality and will be abundant, generous, gracious as you would expect God to be.

John calls this the first of the signs – this is his special word for Jesus' miracles – they are signs pointing towards something. The fact that he labels this as the first suggests that there is something foundational or programmatic about this miracle.

Prayer suggestions

- Thank God for his miracle of new creation in bringing you to be his child.
- Ask that you will always trust Jesus and never try and 'trade' your way into his favour
- Ask God to show you areas of your life that need to be renewed and then for his power to make those changes.

5. John 2:12-25

Mark Wormell

Getting started

Do you consider yourself a Christian activist?

What do you think of other Christians who challenge the church or aspects of our culture and politics?

Observation

1. Where does this story start and where does it end? (Unlike the other authors of gospels, John records Jesus moving between Galilee and Jerusalem over a period of three years. Keep an eye out for this. Some commentators believe this suggests John is more 'historically accurate' than is often claimed.)
2. What was the passover festival and why would Jesus go to Jerusalem for Passover? (Note that Jesus goes to Jerusalem for at least two more Passovers, 6:4 and 11:55-19)
3. Why would there be animals and money changers in the Temple courts, particularly with Passover approaching?
4. What were the political implications of Jesus' violent actions?
5. Why might Jesus call the Temple his 'Father's house'?
6. What could be the intended effect of Jesus quoting in verse 17 from Psalm 69:9?
7. Why might the Jews ask for a miraculous sign from Jesus?
8. What purpose is achieved by Jesus saying, 'destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days'? (see verses 20-22)
9. Why might John not record the 'miraculous signs' Jesus performed in Jerusalem? (John's point is Jesus' identification of the temple as his Father's house and his authority to judge and punish sin.)

Interpretation

1. What does this passage show us about the character of Jesus?
2. What does this passage show us about the purpose of Jesus?
3. Why does Jesus not need other people to testify about him? How does this fit with the significance of John the Baptist's testimony in chapter 1? (Note this theme is continued in 5:31-39; 8:14 and 10:25)
4. What does this story teach us about pure worship?
5. Was Jesus just challenging the corruption and absence of proper worship, or was he suggesting that he had come to replace the whole sacrificial system?

Implications

1. What is it about Jesus that helps you see him as more than a teacher?
2. The temple was destroyed. We now meet God in Jesus and his Spirit dwells within us. A church building is not a temple. To what uses should we put our church buildings, and are we limited by this passage in answering this question?
3. What do we need to do to ensure pure worship?
4. In verses 23-24, Jesus appears to put little trust in people who seek or are influenced by signs? Do and should we seek signs today? How do we help people whose faith is weak and are always seeking signs?

Prayer suggestions

1. That our lives may be pure.
2. That we may trust Jesus without seeking more signs.
3. That we will be alive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Notes:

The temple in this story was not 'Solomon's temple' (1 Kings), as that was destroyed by the Babylonians c.596-86. Nor is it the smaller and less imposing temple build by the Israelites on their return from exile (c.537: see Ezra). It was the one that King Herod had started in BC 19 to try to impress the Jews. It had been in construction in for 46 years, and would be completed in AD 64, before being destroyed in AD70.

Verse 19 is often misquoted. Jesus did not say that he would destroy the temple. He said, in effect, that if/when his body was destroyed, God would raise him in three days.

A question you may ask is how this passage relates to the 'clearing of the temple' that are recorded in Mt 21:12-17, Mk. 11:15-18 and Lk 19:45-46 as occurring the the last week of Jesus' life. Possible explanations include:

1. There were two similar events, one at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and one at the end, and each author chose to record only one.
2. John's account is historically accurate and the other authors chose to relocate the event to suit their literary purposes.
3. The other three accounts are historically accurate and John chose to relocate the event to suit his literary purposes.

It is clear that each author chose material, and ordered it, in ways to suit his purposes in writing his gospel. The arguments between the alternatives are complex. On balance, I prefer the first alternative, in part because the clearing recorded by John did not attract the violent response that the later one did. He got away with it once, when he was building in popularity, but could not get away with it a second time, as the opposition to him increased. However you land on this issue, what purpose is served by John recording this event so early in his narrative?

Like much of John's gospel, a great deal is going on here. We see evidence of Jesus' self understanding and relationship with his Father. We see his judgement on corrupt worship and inadequate faith. We see his anticipation of his cleansing death, when his body would be destroyed and raised in glory. And we see the type of public political act that would lead him into conflict with the Jewish leaders. There is this, and more, in only 10 verses!

6. John 3:1-21

Mark Wormell

Getting started

Where do you see humour in the Bible? How funny ('funny ha ha') do you think God is? Is God's humour one of the things you look forward to exploring in the age to come?

Observation

1. Who was Nicodemus?
2. Why might Nicodemus come to Jesus at night (and is there any significance to this given the light/dark imagery John uses throughout this gospel)?
3. Do you think the incongruous image that Nicodemus' question in verse 4 draws is intended to be humorous?
4. Why does Jesus use the imagery of wind in vv 5-9?
5. Nicodemus came asking for an explanation of signs, which we saw in 2:23-24 are an inadequate basis for faith. What does he get instead?
6. Verses 12-13 have been translated in a number different ways. What point is Jesus making? (The point is not that, at the time Jesus met Nicodemus, Jesus had already ascended into heaven and had come back. Rather, Jesus is the Son of Man, whose home is in heaven where all wisdom resides. No one has been there and returned. Jesus reveals the wisdom of heaven in a way no one else can.)
7. What is the link between Jesus and the bronze snake on the pole from Numbers 21:4-9? (God provides new life. It comes from Jesus being lifted up on Cross.)
8. In what ways do verses 17-21 clarify verse 16?
9. What images in this passage were introduced in John 1:1-18?

Interpretation

1. How well does Jesus seem to know the heart of Nicodemus? (Bear this in mind when you get to the Samaritan woman (4:1-26), the gentile official (4:43-53), the man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-15), and others.)
2. How complete or far-reaching is this new birth/regeneration/transformation?
3. In what ways may a non-Christian not understand someone born of the Spirit (verse 8)?
4. According to John, when does the Kingdom of God, or the new Spirit given life of 3:16, start?
5. Is there a 'third way', or only perishing or eternal life?

Implications

1. What must we do to avoid perishing and have eternal life? (Yes, the ultimate 'Dorothy-dixer'. But just because 'we know this', don't skate over it. Everything flows from trusting this truth.)
2. What care do you need to use when talking about 'being born again' with people who come from a different Christian background (e.g. those less familiar with the Bible or who are wary of evangelicals)?
3. How can being 'born again' be reconciled with the experience of some Christians who have always known God and have not had a period or time of 'conversion'?
4. Based on verse 16, how would you define 'love'? How similar or different is this from contemporary uses of the word 'love'?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thank God for his acts of creation and re-creation, birth and new birth, through his love.
2. Ask God to help us understand the depth and glory of being reborn.
3. Ask that our family and friends, and the whole world may believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Notes:

Nicodemus reappears in 7:50 and 19:39. You might like to think how his relationship with Jesus develops through this gospel.

The meaning of 'born of water and spirit' (not 'Spirit') is unclear, and many suggestions have been made. Given that Nicodemus knew the OT, and was not yet a Christian, it is likely that 'water' is not a metaphor for baptism. It is more likely the background is the cleansing and purification associated with water in the OT. The phrase is parallel with 'born from above' and probably means purification and new life from God.

It is not clear whether verses 16-21 are words of Jesus, or John's commentary on Jesus, or some amalgam of the two. These verses are probably John's meditation on Jesus, but, either way, they are from God.

7. John 3:22-36

Mark Wormell

Getting started

In the reading today, Jesus is referred to as the 'groom'. Where else do you find the image of Jesus as the groom, and his followers (and later the church) being the bride? (Matthew 25: 1-13; Luke 5:34-35; Ephesians 5:25-27 and several times in Revelation 18-22) What impression does this create of the relationship between Jesus and his followers?

Observation

1. What type of dispute do you think could arise over John's baptism? (It may have been a dispute between John's rite of purification, and Jewish practices.)
2. The Jew seems to be trying to diminish the Baptist's ministry (e.g. not 'everyone' was flocking to Jesus as still many were going to John). How does the tone of 'the Jew' contrast with the Baptist's response about grace and dependence?
3. What is the role of the best man (the friend of the groom)?
4. In verse 34, what is the connection between Jesus speaking God's words, and Jesus having the Spirit without limit (a better translation than 'without measure')?
5. How does Jesus having the Spirit without limit, contrast with all other prophets that had gone before Jesus?
6. In what ways is 'the One' (Jesus) from above? In what ways is he above all?
7. What might Jesus have 'seen and heard', as the only Son of God?
8. What is God's wrath? (It is the *personal* response of a holy God, who will do anything consistent with his character to spare people who trust him.)

Interpretation

1. Should we only baptise when there is plenty of water (verse 23)? (Compare this with Acts 2:41, when about 3,000 were baptised in Jerusalem, which notoriously had a limited water supply, and Acts 8:26, where a baptism occurred in the middle of a desert.)
2. Why should we accept John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus speaking truth about God? (John the Baptist is presented as a prophet, that is a messenger from God.)
3. This is a harder question: how does the parable of the bride and groom show John's understating of Jesus as the Messiah? (There are many OT passages that talk about the faithful people of Israel being the bride of the Lord (Isaiah 62:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2:16-20) Jesus is showing how he fulfils those prophecies.)

4. In what ways is verse 35 true, given that verse 16 says God gave his one and only Son over to death?
5. John 3:16 is often seen as the central truth of the Christian gospel. How is this reinforced, and expanded, in verses 31-36?
6. How does this passage build our understanding of Jesus?

Implications

1. How happy should we be about other churches (including those close-by) growing greatly in numbers?
2. Verse 36, like 3:16-21, appears to present a binary choice: eternal life or God's wrath and condemnation. How might we speak these words of truth to the world? What has worked for you, and what hasn't?

Prayer suggestions

1. For joy and contentment in what God enables and wills you to do.
2. That Christianity will be seen by the world to be a relationship of joy with a loving God.
3. For those known to you who are not yet assured of avoiding God's wrath.

Notes:

The commentator, Don Carson, notes this is the fourth successive section to point out the ways Jesus surpasses Judaism. Jesus provides new wine that was better than ritualistic purification. Jesus displaces the temple, and points to the way Jesus is the place we meet God, or the ultimate point of mediation between humans and God. Jesus fulfils the prophesy of 'water and spirit, in the OT, and proves in his death to be the 'ultimate antitype' of the snake 'lifted up' in the desert. And John surpasses John the Baptist and his rite of purification. Keep this in mind as you move into the next chapter where the uniqueness of Jesus has effect outside Palestinian Judaism.

This gospel is the only one that mentions that Jesus baptised. In 4:2 it is made clear his disciples did this.

The other gospels start Jesus' public ministry after John the Baptist was arrested. John explains his ministry started before that arrest.

8. John 4:1-42

Mark Wormell

Getting started

When do you speak with people who may be thought to have nothing in common with you?

How does it go?

Observation

1. Where is Samaria, who were the Samaritans, and what was the general relationship between the Jews and Samaritans? (Samaria is north of Jerusalem, between Judea and Galilee. It is the direct way between these two areas of Jesus' ministry. The Samaritans believed in the first 5 books of Scripture, but not the rest. They worshiped on Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. There was distrust and animosity between the Samaritans and Jews.)
2. What were the social implications of Jesus talking to, and accepting drink from, an unaccompanied Samaritan woman?
3. What are the theological implications of Jesus being thirsty? (He was 'truly human'. He had become 'flesh' (1:4))
4. Rather than being defiled by taking something from the Samaritan woman, Jesus sanctifies what he touches. What did Jesus offer the woman?
5. What questions were going through the woman's mind?
6. What does Jesus know about the woman, and what does this show about Jesus?
7. What does the relational status of the woman suggest about her moral standing in her community?
8. Why might the woman change the subject to their differences in theology? (Some suggest it is to avoid talking about her sin. But it may be she was genuinely interested in their theological differences.)
9. How would you summarise Jesus' teaching in verses 21-24?
10. It is sometimes suggested that Jesus was just a good teacher, and did not identify as God's Messiah. Is this supported by verses 25-26? (It is possible Jesus discloses himself as the Messiah to a Samaritan, but not so overtly to Jews, because the Jews attached too many political and military implications to the title.)
11. What is the 'food' Jesus offers, what is the harvest, and who are the sower and the reaper?
12. What was the value of the woman's testimony?

Interpretation

1. What links are there between this story and the earlier stories in John? (Water symbolism, baptism, Jesus disclosing himself as the fulfilment of OT promises and purification.)
2. What did Jesus think he could offer? (i.e. look for the meaning behind the metaphors of living water and food, but also consider how he lifted the woman in to new relations with her people.)
3. In what way(s) was Jesus greater than Jacob? (Jacob needed a deep well to get water. Jesus needed no well for his living water and offered the means (living water) to eternal life.)
4. Why did many of the Samaritans believe in Jesus?
5. What does this say about Jesus' awareness of his mission?

Implications

1. How refreshing is living water?
2. How should we assess growth in the church?
3. What social/cultural boundaries do we need to cross to share the good news of Jesus? (Try to be specific.)

Prayer suggestions

1. That we may accept the free gift of living water.
2. That we can embody the freedom from sin, the possibility of new relations, and the joy in sharing the gospel, that are so evident in this woman.

Notes:

The misunderstanding we saw when Nicodemus confronted the concept of being born again continues here with misunderstandings about the nature and effect of living water. More of God's humour?

The sixth hour is probably about midday (i.e. six hours after dawn). Normally people fetched water at the start of the day. The timing in this story probably suggests she was an outcast in her own community.

Some commentators have criticised the gospel of John as being 'anti-semitic', because he has some harsh things to say about the Jews. However, here he explains that at least the Jews know the God they worship, and affirms that salvation is from the Jews. This does not mean all Jews will be saved, but it is positive about the Jewish religion which Jesus fulfils.

There are too many OT references in this passage to mention here. Your appreciation of this story will be greatly enhanced by reading a commentary on this passage, e.g. Don Carson's, *The Gospel According to John*.

9. John 4:43-54

Mark Wormell

Getting started

When was the last time you did a return journey of 300kms on foot to go to worship God? (No. Me neither!)

Observation

1. The proverb in 4:44 does not seem to fit with the welcome in 4:45. Why do you think John mentions the proverb in verse 44? (Many answers have been proposed. Some suggest 'own country' refers to Judea, where Jesus faced opposition. Some suggest it means Galilee, and say that, despite the response of the official, Jesus did not receive the honour there that was due to him. But perhaps 'own country' refers to both Judea and Galilee, and are in contrast to the success Jesus had just had in the foreign land of Samaria.)
2. What did the royal official want from Jesus?
3. What is the tone of Jesus' words in verse 48, and how does this echo earlier events? (See, 2:23-25)
4. Having been rebuked in verse 48, how does the royal official respond?
5. What is Jesus' response to the royal official's further plea for Jesus to save his son from death?

Interpretation

1. Why do you think Jesus healed the son?
2. If Jesus placed a low value on people who believed because of miracles/signs, why did Jesus do them?
3. What is the main point of this story?
4. What does this story show us about Jesus?
5. What is central to honouring Jesus?

Implications

1. Have you ever felt totally overwhelmed by circumstances?
2. If you have, how has this affected your relationship with God?
3. Do you think this story helps us understand our total dependence on God and his goodness, and the need to persist in our trust?
4. How does this help us when we don't get what we ask for?

Prayer suggestions

1. That we will always give Jesus the honour he deserves.
2. That God reveal to us the parts of our lives where we do not yet trust him.

Notes:

There is no indication the royal official was a Gentile. Nor does the royal official show the trust the Roman soldier did. So this need not be the same story we see in Matthew 8:5-13.

10. John 5:1-18

Bill Salier

Getting started

What is the most memorable/successful experience that you have had reading the Bible? Why did it 'work'?

Observation and interpretation

Thinking about this study...

This study has a lot of questions to be answered or at least considered as you read through verse by verse. It is trying to replicate a close reading approach and ask some questions of you as a reader as you move through each verse. Some questions will seem trivial and others unanswerable (either not enough information in the text or too hard). Don't spend too much time discussing a particular question and also don't worry too much if you have to leave a question 'unresolved' along the way. Perhaps a way to do this would be for one person to have the questions and everyone else simply have their Bibles open in front of them.

Read verse 1

What feast is in mind?

Have any other feasts of the Jews been mentioned in the Gospel so far? (see John 2:13)

What happened last time Jesus was in Jerusalem and met 'the Jews' (see 2:12–23, especially verse 20)? What is the effect of calling it a 'feast of the Jews'?

Read verses 2-3

Read the following brief excerpt of material about the pool. What is the effect of the amount of detail in the description of the pool and surrounds in the passage in John?

Some Background: The Pool

External evidence confirms the existence of the pool that John writes about. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls mentions the pool's title 'by Bethesdatayin, in the pool where you enter is a smaller basin'. The pool is near the 'sheep gate'. The Sheep Gate is a gate in the north-eastern wall of the Temple. Sheep for the sacrificial offerings were probably led through this gate into the temple. Excavation beneath St Anne's monastery in the early twentieth century revealed twin pools that most identify as the pool in John 5. The pools were approximately as big as a football field and 6 m deep. The five porticoes made up a porch on each of the four sides of the pool and one separating them.

Read verses 5-6

What happened to verse 4?

How would you explain this 'phenomenon' in a Parish Bible study?

What is your response to the information given about the man?

Does the number 38 resonate with any other biblical numbers?

What do you think of Jesus' question to the man?

Is there any reason a sick person might not want to get well (both then and now)?

Read verse 7

What does this verse suggest about the man's illness?

What do you think of his answer to Jesus' question – is it a yes or no?

How does this answer help to explain the riddle of the missing verse 4?

Read verses 8, 9

What do you think of the 'miracle'?

What is missing if you compare this to a similar kind of healing in the other Gospels?

What does this tell us about Jesus' power in this kind of situation?

What did you think/how did you feel when you were told that this incident took place on a Sabbath?

Why do you think John holds this piece of information back so long?

Read verses 10-13

What do you think of the Jews' statement in verse 10?

Who do you think 'the Jews' are?

Why do you think the man doesn't know Jesus' name?

Why do you think Jesus is described as having 'slipped away' into the crowd?

What impression do you have of Jesus at this point?

Read verses 14, 15

Why do you think Jesus finds the man again?

What do you think Jesus means by what he says to the man, what are the possibilities?

What do you think was the man's 'sinning'?

Did it cause his illness or is he doing something wrong now as well?

Do you think bad things can happen to people because they sin?

What other evidence is there in the Bible for thinking about this?

How do you feel about the man who has been healed at the end of verse 15?

The word translated 'told' in this verse is also used in John 4.25 (NIV: 'declared', 16.13 'tell you', 14, 15 'make known to you'): does this suggest anything about the man's statement?

Read verses 16 -18

Some Background: The Sabbath and God 'working'

Behind Jesus' statement in verse 16 is a long running discussion amongst Jewish Rabbi's concerning God's work on the Sabbath. According to Gen 2.2-3 God finished his work of creation and rested. He then keeps the Sabbath law. But if he rests entirely from his work then who keeps the universe running while he rests? If he 'works' on the Sabbath then has he in fact broken his own law? A number of different solutions were offered including the fact that the universe is God's domain and that he therefore never carries anything outside of that is therefore free to do what he likes; God's work of creation ceased but his work of judging continued. However it was worked out, all agreed that God works continuously.

Note the escalation in the Jews response to Jesus in these verses. What causes this escalation?

What is the thrust of Jesus' reply to the Jews?

What is the Jews' problem with Jesus apparently making himself equal to God?

Summing up:

Choose three words that describe Jesus, the man who was healed, and the Jews after reading this account. (You could do this as a group on a larger piece of paper)

Jesus

The man who was healed

The Jews

What questions remain unanswered for you at the end of this particular narrative?

Implications

1. What insights could you use from this passage in a pastoral ministry setting?
2. How do you respond to questions about the healing power of Jesus today?

11. John 5:19-47

Bill Salier

Getting started

What problems have you run into when trying to explain to others (neighbours/children) that 'Jesus is God'?

Observation and interpretation

1. Read verses 19-27

Under the headings Father and Jesus, chart the relative roles and actions of each.

Father

Jesus

2. Why can Jesus do what he does? (verses 20, 23, 27)

3. Why is this important information to know? (verses 24-27)

Some background

In the second half of this passage Jesus speaks about the reliability of the information he is giving. In a Jewish legal setting at least two witnesses were required to substantiate a claim and a person could not testify on their own behalf. It is in this framework that Jesus' next speech ought to be read.

Read verses 31-47

4. What is Jesus' point in verse 31?

5. List the testimonies to Jesus in verses 33-40. How do the different 'testifiers' relate to each other?

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Testifier</i>	<i>Jesus' comment (if any)</i>
John 5.32		
John 5.33		
John 5.36		
John 5.37		
John 5.39		

6. What is Jesus' point in verses 41-44? What problem does Jesus identify with his opponent's response to himself?

Going deeper

When Jesus speaks about how he can claim to be equal with God he speaks of his total obedience and submission to the Father.

Obedience and submission aren't very popular words these days. What does the fact that these qualities appear to be at the very heart of the divine Father Son relationship mean for a Christian's understanding of these ideas?

What areas do you find it difficult to be obedient and submissive, where perhaps you ought? Eg. Work, parents, etc. How does this picture of the relationship between Father and Son help or hinder your thinking in these areas?

OR

One of the key themes in John is that of 'testimony'. We are reliant on the testimony of others for what we know about the Father and his son Jesus. How well accepted is the concept of 'testimony' in our world today? Are there problems with this idea in people's minds? Some suggest that we should witness to Christ through our own testimony to him, what do you think of this evangelistic strategy?

12. John 6:1-29

Bill Salier

Getting started

Have you ever witnessed a miracle? Discuss.

Observation and interpretation

Thinking about this study...

For this part of the study you will need to ask for participants a week in advance so they can think about their response. You may like to have a reporter as well.

Some background to help you assume a character in the interviews...

Jesus and the disciples cross the lake and come to a mountain where they see the large crowd that has followed on land. Jesus goes up on the mountain and teaches the crowd in the context of the impending Passover Feast. The context of the mountain, teaching and Passover recalls the experience of Moses and Israel. This is reinforced with the action of the crowd at the end of the account. They ask if this might be the prophet (the one promised by Moses in Deuteronomy 18) and then seek to make him King.

There are some unusual details recorded in Jesus' testing of his disciples with his request of Philip. Jesus' foresight and sovereignty is contrasted with the disciples' helplessness and uncertainty. The size of the crowd means the task is impossible for the impoverished disciples as Philip acknowledges in a detail that also serves to amplify the magnitude of what is about to happen. Andrew finds a young boy with his lunch. The loaves are the low quality bread of the poor and the fish are most likely some small sardine like fish to give a bit of taste to the bread. The details in the account, green grass, the amount of money is about right to feed a group like that, the poor quality of the boys lunch, the collection of uneaten food at the end etc again breathe the air of an eyewitness account that sits well within what we know of the social and historical context.

At the end 12 baskets of leftovers are collected recalling the twelve tribes of Israel. It looks like Jesus directs his own 12 as a renewed or reconstituted Israel feeding and providing for them.

The desire to make Jesus King fits in with what we know of the volatility of the times with revolutionary movements and figures around. The desire of many to rebel and break free of Roman rule was strong and Jesus' actions, so reminiscent of Moses, the great liberator of Israel makes him a likely candidate to lead and rule. Jesus will be presented as king in the Gospel but it will be on his own terms.

The sea walking incident follows next. The whole incident must have been terrifying for the disciples; first the storm and then this person walking effortlessly towards them. His words I am do not be afraid could only recall the name of the Lord in the OT and the appearances of the mysterious angel of the Lord. Walking on water was recognised at that time as a sign of divinity in a variety of religious contexts. There appears to be a second miracle as the boat arrives immediately on the shore once Jesus enters the boat. This appears to be a private manifestation to the disciples and may well be important for their own staying with Jesus at the end of the chapter. It is clearly an important moment along with the feeding as these two incidents are recorded in all Gospels. It is curious then that so little is made of the incident by John.

The journey of the crowd to find Jesus is a little confusing. The crowd that had been fed remained 'on the other side', where the feeding took place. They realise that there had only been one boat and that Jesus was not on it. Perhaps they are meant to work out that something extraordinary has happened. In any case it seems that while many might have gone home a number also stayed perhaps in the hope that Jesus

might still be around. Some boats from Tiberias came across the lake to where the crowd was. Perhaps they were blown by the storm or perhaps they had come to fetch friends and neighbours. Realising that Jesus was not around they then take off to Capernaum to try and find him. At this point Capernaum was the home base for Jesus and his disciples (2:12). The rest of the talking takes place in the synagogue at Capernaum. They do find him but their question shows they do not even conceive of the possibility of Jesus' actual mode of movement. They address him as Rabbi (teacher) although they will soon dispute his teaching. The crowd is generally confused through the Fourth Gospel. Jesus discerns their true motives for searching for him: they want more food and perhaps him to lead them in a liberation movement with no real idea of the meaning of what he has done in view. Once again an action with symbolic/spiritual significance is taken on a purely earthly level by Jesus' hearers.

Questions for Philip

Describe the situation as you saw it.

How did you feel when Jesus first approached you about getting food for the crowd?

What did you think when Andrew suggested the boy's lunch might be used?

Tell us about the events that night.

Putting the two incidents together what do you think about Jesus?

Questions for Andrew

Why did you suggest the boy and his food?

What did it look like when Jesus made the bread and fish multiply?

How did the people respond when you distributed the food?

Did the 12 baskets of leftovers mean anything do you think?

Questions for a person in the crowd

What did you think when Jesus fed the crowd?

Who did you think he might be?

What did you want him to do?

How did you feel when you couldn't find him?

Questions for a person in the crowd the next day

Take us through the sequence of events the next morning

What do you think happened during the night?

How did you feel when Jesus spoke to you at Capernaum?

What do you think about Jesus?

Implications

'If only Jesus were here today and could do some more miracles, then people would really find it easier to believe in him' What do you think of this statement on the basis of what you have been reading in John's Gospel?

What 'bread' of the world tempts to you to fill your belly and ignore the 'bread from heaven'?

Jesus' statements about eating and drinking are, amongst other things, allusions to his violent death. We do not have a saviour without the offence of the cross. In what ways do people find the cross offensive these days and how would you respond to their comments?

13. John 6:25-59

Bill Salier

Getting started

How do you explain to other people what it means for you to follow Jesus and identify with him? What images and metaphors do you use to illustrate this and help them understand?

Observation and interpretation

Introduction: read verses 25-31 to establish the context

Bread from heaven (verses 32-51)

Some background

A particular teaching technique in Judaism was to take a text and then pick out individual words within it and expand and explain these. The text was usually taken from the Torah (first 5 books of what we call the OT). The teacher would often bring in another supplementary text from either the prophets or the writings to make a supplementary point.

This is what Jesus appears to be doing from verse 32 onwards. Jesus takes the scripture the crowd quotes in verse 31 and then his 'sermon' expands on ideas from the text, the ideas of 'bread' and 'from heaven'.

In verse 45 he introduces another text from Isaiah and expands on that until in verses 48-51 he summarises his point so far.

In response to the Jews question in verse 52 the final part of his sermon focuses on the word 'eat.'

1. In verse 32, how does Jesus correct the crowd's understanding expressed in verse 31?
2. According to verses 35-40, 48-51 what does it mean for Jesus to be the bread of life?
3. What is the Jews problem with Jesus' teaching in verse 41-2?
4. What is Jesus' point in verse 43-47 as he replies to the Jews grumbling?

Eating the bread of life (verses 53-59)

1. What do you think Jesus means by these words? If he is not speaking literally why do you think he speaks in such graphic terms?

Implications

How would you answer the Jews' question in verse 52?

While this passage is not about the Lord's Supper we do use similar language when celebrating it: take and eat, take and drink... How do you respond emotionally to this language (either in the Lord's Supper or as a metaphor for relationship with Christ)?

How useful are graphic metaphors like these in 21st century Australia? Do they clarify or confuse?

If you were going to use a metaphor for helping people understand that they need to rely only on Jesus what would you use?

14. John 6:60-70

Bill Salier

Getting started

Who have you known that has fallen away from the Christian faith? Why did it happen? How did you react?

Observation and interpretation

1. Who is doing the grumbling here (verses 60-61)?
2. Where in the Bible does the mention of 'grumbling' take you?
3. What do you think Jesus is referring to in verse 62?

There are two main options that have been suggested for understanding the verse. First, Jesus is saying that there will be further offence when he is raised up on the cross. Second, Jesus is suggesting that there will be surprise and vindication of his words when Jesus returns to the Father via the cross and therefore everything he said is true. What do you think?

4. What is Jesus' point in verse 63?
5. Why don't the twelve leave?
6. What is your response to Jesus' teaching in verses 64-65 and verse 70? How do these verses help in understanding the story of Jesus?

Implications

See John 8:32: the true disciple abides in Jesus' word. This is immediately tested when Jesus speaks to those who had believed in him and suggests that they are sinful. Many find it hard to 'abide' in this word of Jesus.

What 'hard teachings' are there in the Christian faith that you find difficult to accept? How do you deal with this?

How do/will you respond to people who come up to you and express doubts about some Christian truths? Perhaps two members of the group could role play a conversation along these lines. (If you have time perhaps you could get two pairs to show a good way and a poor way).

15. John 7 – Jesus on trial

Bill Salier

Thinking about this study...

So far John has shown us a little more of who Jesus is (John 5) and what he has come to do (John 6). In John 7 the reactions of various groups of people are presented. The setting is the Feast of Tabernacles.

You have choice in this study as to what to focus upon. The first approach will be to read through the entire chapter and look at the various ways that Jesus' claims are assessed and responded to. This forms part of an overall 'trial theme' that pervades the Gospel.

The second approach is to focus on a very specific claim that Jesus makes in the midst of the feast in verses 37–39.

Approach 1

Getting Started

What are the main estimates of Jesus that you hear around the place? What evidence or reasons do people offer for their opinions?

Observation and interpretation

Read through the chapter and collate the various responses to Jesus that John details. These will be both negative and positive and often there will be a reason given or a problem stated with Jesus and his claims. Occasionally there will also be a reply from Jesus or a defence of sorts offered. In the chart below collate the various options as you read through the text...

Verses	Character	Response/Assessment of Jesus	Reason (if any)	Reply/Defence (if any)
7:3-8				
7:14-19				
7:20-24				
7:25-29				
7:30-31				
7:40				
7:41				
7:41-43				
7:45-46				
7:47-49				
7:50-52				

Implications

What has been helpful in this chapter in thinking through how to approach people and their (mis)conceptions about the person of Jesus?

The chapter has mainly focussed around the claim that Jesus is the Christ. What does this title mean and is it relevant for today?

The chapter has breathed the air of argument and sort of proof in discussion about Jesus. Some Christians are nervous about this suggesting that our responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel and not argue for it. How would you respond to that?

Approach 2

Getting Started

Read through John 7:1-36 in order to get some idea of the context in which Jesus speaks.

Some Background: The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles was a festival celebrating the harvest of grapes and olives around September/October. According to Josephus it was the most popular Jewish festival of them all. People flocked to Jerusalem and lived, for the week, in makeshift booths or tabernacles. While it was a harvest festival it also provided an opportunity to recall God's mercy to the Israelites as they travelled through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. It was well known for both lamp lighting and water drawing ceremonies.

The water-pouring ceremony involved filling a golden flagon of water from the Pool of Siloam. This was then taken in a procession led by the High Priest to the Temple. As the procession approached the Watergate, there were three trumpet blasts. Inside the Temple there was then a parade around the altar with Psalms 113 – 118 being chanted. As Psalm 118 was chanted a palm branch intertwined with willow and myrtle twigs was shaken a citrus fruit raised in the left hand. Everyone would then cry 'Give thanks to the Lord' and the water would be poured into silver bowls and then poured out as an offering to God. The water was poured out into the shaft at the side of the altar and the altar, or more precisely the rock on which it rested, was said to mark the spot where the world's thirst was quenched.

The light ceremony involved the lighting of chandeliers or lanterns so that all Jerusalem seemed to be bathed in the light from the temple.

All of this of course occurred at the Temple, a place of major significance for the Jewish people. The Temple stands at the centre of the city that is at the centre of Israelite national and religious life. It is the place where God made his name or glory to dwell. The temple was in fact significant for the whole cosmos: it is likened to creation in its establishment in Ps 78; the Lord dwells there and from there of course the fate of the whole earth is decided. The temple and Jerusalem were central in prophetic visions of the final and universal salvation of the new age. Following the exile the temple was a central symbol of the hope for the restored nation, while Isaiah notes that it will also be a house of prayer for all peoples (Is 56:7 cf also Zech 14.10). According to Ezekiel 47, in the messianic age a river would flow from under the altar in the Temple and go out into the entire world.

Read John 7:37–39

1. What significance has water had in John's Gospel so far? See John 2:1–11, 3:5; 4:7–15; 5:7.
2. How provocative are Jesus' actions here? How do they interact with the symbolism of the water pouring ceremony (see also Isaiah 12:16; Zech 14:1-8; Ezek 36:25–27)? What is being claimed here by Jesus in this action?
3. How does John interpret the symbolism?

Implications

1. How would you apply the Gospel's teaching on Jesus and water to today? See Jeremiah 2:13
2. What are the implications of this passage for your own personal response to Jesus? What are the implications for thinking about your activities as a follower of Jesus?

16. John 8:12-59

Like Jesus' first hearers, we all must decide whether to accept or reject the offer of freedom through Jesus.

Andrew Judd

Getting started

If you were going to gaol tomorrow and could take one object with you, what would it be?

Observation

>> Tweet wall exercise

This is a complex exchange, in which Jesus and his opponents (the religious leaders, called Pharisees) are debating lots of related issues. Divide the five main sections of the debate between the group and try to summarise what each side is arguing into one tweet per side of no more than 140 characters (including hashtags).

It can work well to put the tweets on a whiteboard or big piece of paper.

Verses 13-20	
Verses 21-30	
Verses 31-36	
Verses 37-47	
Verses 48-59	

Interpretation

Read verses 31-32. Jesus says that if we know the truth the truth will set us free. What are some of the things Jesus could mean by this?

Read verse 34. Jesus says that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. We usually think of freedom as a lack of constraint, and sin is often unconstrained. So what is it about that sin that Jesus is trying to help them see?

Read verse 39. Why might it be so significant for these people that Abraham is their father? (You might like to read Psalm 105:5-11)

Read Exodus 3:13-14. What light does this shed on Jesus' highly controversial statement in verse 58?

Application

Why are Jesus' listeners incapable of receiving his message of freedom? What roadblocks are there which stop modern Australian listeners from hearing the message about Jesus?

This might be a good opportunity to talk about:

- Intellectual roadblocks – beliefs which seem incompatible with Christians, or doubts we might have; as well as:
- Heart roadblocks – things we love more than God, which get in the way of receiving Jesus.

This passage contains a stark contrast between those who think that they are God's children because of their membership in the religious community, and those who really are God's children.

- Is there any risk that people today might wrongly think that they are God's children? On what basis might they assume it?
- What might some of the marks of God's true children?
- Is it possible to have assurance that we won't end up like the Pharisees (thinking that we are God's children but being tragically misguided)? If so, how?

Prayer suggestions

This week, rather than share prayer points for each other consider spending some time giving thanks for our adoption as children into God's family, and all the blessing which come from it. Then maybe pray for people who we can share this good news with.

17. John 9

Mark Wormell

Getting started

How do you respond to someone who asks, 'why does God allow suffering to be so unevenly distributed in this world?'

Observation

1. The disciples ask Jesus a theological question. What don't they ask him, that they may have asked based on their knowledge of what he can do?
2. Where else has John used the metaphor of 'light' to describe Jesus?
3. Were the Pharisees on firm ground in questioning Jesus making mud and healing on the Sabbath?
4. What needs does Jesus see in the blind man?
5. Why did the Pharisees question the blind man's parents?
6. What differences do you see in the attitudes of the blind man and his parents to Jesus and their respective positions in society?
7. Why did the Pharisees fear anyone proclaiming Jesus as Christ?
8. Why does Jesus say he came into the world? (Verse 39)
9. How does this chapter progress the growing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees?

Interpretation

1. What lies behind the disciples' opening question in verse 2? What Bible passages suggest that there is no direct link between individual sins and individual experiences of suffering? (e.g. The Book of Job, Luke 13:1-5).
2. What are the implications of Jesus saying in verse 4 that 'night is coming'.
3. Jesus could have commanded sight for the man born blind? Why do you think he may have used saliva and dust to make mud? What theological insights flow from this? (Consider Genesis 2:7, Leviticus 15:8 and Matthew 8:1-4).
4. What are the implications of some of the neighbours not recognising the once-blind man?
5. Does the fact that Jesus gave sight prove that he must be from God? (Compare and contrast this with Exodus 7:8-13).
6. What progress do you see in the once-blind man's relationship with Jesus? What brings this about?
7. In what ways is Jesus 'the Light of the World'? (For example: As the Word who created everything that is, he affirms the goodness of creation (including sight). He brings spiritual light. He destroys darkness.)
8. What do we learn about Jesus in this passage?

Implications

1. What attitudes to sin are displayed by the disciples, the Pharisees and Jesus in this passage?
2. How have you experienced the Light of the World in your life?
3. Neither the neighbours nor the Pharisees rejoice that the man can now see? Where does rejoicing at the works of God fit within your spiritual life?
4. What in this story makes you want to love Jesus more than you did before?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thank God for his acts of creation and re-creation.
2. Ask God to ensure that his Holy Spirit always encourages us to rejoice at the works of God.
3. Ask that our family and friends, and the whole world may receive and believe in the Light of the World.

This passage raises the issue of the relationship between sin and suffering/punishment, both at the beginning (verse 2) and the end (verses 39-41). Pastorally this is a very significant issue. Many people, including people who have been Christians for many years, almost intuitively, ask the question, when something goes wrong, 'what have I done to deserve this?' The disciples asked their question before Jesus had died and been raised. They were still working out what type of Christ/Messiah Jesus would be. They did not understand that Jesus would die for the sins of the world (despite what they heard at John 3:16). Therefore, they did not know that Jesus would take the punishment for all our sins (past, present and future). We now know that, given God's acceptance of Jesus' atoning death on the Cross, nothing that goes wrong for us now is the direct consequence of something we do wrong. We are forgiven. We are redeemed. We are justified. We are adopted. All these are present realities. But it's often hard to remember these life changing truths as we deal with the challenges and disappointments of this life.

18. John 10:1-21

Andrew Judd

Jesus declares himself to be the good shepherd, rebuking Israel's leaders for their spiritual blindness. Jesus is both the gate (the only way to be saved) and the good shepherd (the one who lays his life down for the sheep). Obedience to Jesus is life to the full.

This passage is really part of one section which starts with the blind man in chapter 9:1 and goes till the end of chapter 10 (hence the reference back to the blind man in 10:21).

Getting started

Who was your favourite teacher at school? What set them apart from the other teachers?

Observation and interpretation

Read Ezekiel 34:1-24. What are some of the promises that God makes in this chapter regarding (1) the leaders of Israel and (2) his scattered people?

God's will deal with the bad shepherds (the spiritual leaders of Israel) who have exploited his people and led them to disaster. He will shepherd his people himself. Then he will appoint one shepherd over them, David.

Read verses 1-6. Jesus is using a figure of speech that his audience doesn't understand.

- Who might the thieves and robbers be referring to?
- Who is Jesus' audience, and why can't they understand Jesus' figure of speech?

>> Draw a diagram of a shepherd on a big piece of paper. As you read through, use post-it notes to add descriptions to the good shepherd (Jesus).

Read verses 7-13.

- What might this second image of the 'gate' suggest about Jesus?
- What dangers does Jesus 'save' his flock from?
- What might 'life to the full' mean?

The use of different sheep related images here can be a little confusing if we try to nail them down too tidily. In this parable, Jesus uses 'several images somewhat interchangeably' (Bible Speaks Today: John, 145).

"Jesus' imagery would have been familiar in a society where sheep-farming was a staple of the economy. The 'fold' or pen was probably a large, communal enclosure where several flocks were herded for safety at

night. The calling of the sheep in the morning (3) would be crucial as each shepherd assembled his own flock from the larger herd in the fold. During the night a guard would be hired (3, the watchman). He would remain at the only door to the enclosure. Robbers could enter only by scaling the enclosure. The guard would admit only the true shepherds by the door when they arrived in the morning.” (BST 145)

Read verses 14-16. What makes someone a member of the flock? Who are these ‘other sheep’ that Jesus is referring to?

Implications

Read verses 17-18. Jesus says that he lays down his life willingly. How would Christianity be different if Jesus had been sacrificed unwillingly?

- What is the link between the knowledge (v15) and love of the Father for the Son, and his laying down his life for us (v17)? Would the Father have still loved the Son even if he had not laid down his life?

In verses 19-21 people are divided over Jesus – is he mad, demon possessed, or is he from God. Are there any other options? What are some of the pieces of evidence that we could use to help us decide for ourselves where we stand?

How do we know if we are part of Jesus’ flock or not?

Jesus promises safety and security for his sheep. Yet Christians live in danger all over the world. How do these two things fit together?

Prayer suggestions

Give thanks for Jesus’ intimate knowledge of us and care for us.

19. John 10:22-42

Mark Wormell

Jesus' sheep hear the voice of their master and receive eternal life

Getting started

What name(s) do you personally use for God? Why?

Note: The Feast of Dedication was a Jewish festival not mandated by Scripture. It celebrated the time when the Jews, under Judas Maccabeus, recaptured the temple in Jerusalem in 164 BC from the brutally repressive Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes. It was also called the Feast of Lights. It is now known as Hanukkah, and occurs in late December.

Observation

1. Who did the Jews think the 'Christ' or 'Messiah' would be and what did they expect him to do? ('Messiah' in Hebrew means 'anointed one'. The Greek translation is 'Christ'.)
2. By chapter 10, what 'miracles' or miraculous works has John recorded Jesus doing?

Note: the word 'miracle' is not used in John's gospel. John's preferred term is 'sign'. In verse 25 the word that some translations record as 'miracles' is 'works'. So Jesus is referring to the works he does in his Father's name.

3. Whose acts does Jesus say his miracles/works are?
4. Why were the Jews so hostile towards Jesus?
5. How is the attitude of John the Baptist towards Jesus affirmed in verses 40-42? (remember John 3:27-30)

Interpretation

1. Why might the 'Jews' want to know plainly if Jesus is the Christ/Messiah?
2. What link does Jesus make between the works he does and his relationship with God?
3. What does Jesus imply when he links 'listening' to his voice and receiving eternal life? (cf. John 3:16)
4. Why can't anyone snatch Jesus' sheep from his hands?
5. In what ways are Jesus and his Father 'one'?

Many people over the years have answered this by talking about function and purpose. But consider whether Jesus maybe talking about a shared divinity that goes beyond shared function and purpose.

Implications

1. Have you heard the voice of Jesus? How?

2. What effect did the voice of Jesus have on you?
3. How do the works that Jesus does help you in your faith?
4. In what ways does this passage help you believe Jesus is 'the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name'? (see John 20:31)
5. Jesus says that the ones who listen to his voice will receive eternal life and will never perish. No one can be snatched from his Father's hand. This fits well with John 6:37-40 and 17:2. But how does this sit with Matthew 13:21, John 15:6 and 16:1, Hebrews 6:6, and your own experience of people who seemed to be Christian 'falling away'?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thanks that you have seen the signs of who Jesus is and you have heard the voice of Jesus.
2. Praise for Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, who gives us eternal life.
3. Pray for people (both known and unknown to you) that they will listen to the voice of Jesus.
4. Pray that no one will fall away.

Extra note on John 10:34-35

Some people in your group may have questions about verses 34-35, in which Jesus references the Old Testament Law which seems to call human beings 'gods'. Here are some notes to help you think through what is going on here:

1. Jesus' opponents have just attempted to kill him (v31) for calling himself the son of the heavenly Father (v 29), thus making himself (in their mind) equal to God (v33). They think that a human being cannot be spoken of as the son of God.
2. Jesus makes a rebuttal to their objection using their own Old Testament Law - as one commentator summarises it: "A single clear idea is in mind as Jesus cites this scripture: In the "Law" (ie, the OT, of which the Law is the chief part; cf 12:34; 15:25), the term "god" is applied to others than God himself; if those addressed by God in this passage can be called gods (and sons of God), how much more can he whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world be so termed?" (Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary).
3. Who are those Old Testament people who are called gods? Perhaps it is false gods or some spiritual forces (they are being demoted to mortal status after all in verse 7!), or perhaps the high flying judges of Israel, or (more likely, I think) Israel herself. I say more likely because in Exodus 4:21 it is clear that Israel as the people of God is properly called God's son. So in a poetic way they can be referring to as gods, though this does not in any way mean that the individual people in Israel are divine, eternal, all powerful or equal to God in his being.

The important thing is to distinguish between what the original Psalm is saying, and what Jesus is using it to do in his debate. The original Psalm in no way elevates them about mortal status; even though it uses the word 'god' it is in a very different sense to Yahweh. Yahweh, the one true God judges them and reduces them to mortality.

When Jesus uses the phrase he is doing something tactical - he is responding to their accusation with a clever point to outwit them - so we need to take his argument as an attack on their position not a complete statement of Jesus' self-understanding. Jesus is the son of God in a way which is far more significant than the people of Israel (John 1:14)!

AJ

20. John 11:1-45

Andrew Judd

Like us, Jesus experiences the sadness of death, weeping over the death of his friend. But unlike us, Jesus has the power to raise the dead.

Getting started

What songs would you like played at your funeral, and why?

Observation and interpretation

Read 11:1-16

- Why might Jesus have delayed going to see Lazarus?

Read 11:17-45

- If you had to pick two adjectives to describe the picture we get of Jesus in this section, what would they be?

Implications

How does the raising of Lazarus differ from Jesus' resurrection?

Mary struggles with Jesus' absence in her time of need (verse 32), and the crowd wonders why Jesus didn't prevent him from dying (verse 37). We often struggle to understand why God seems to sit back while terrible things happen to those we love.

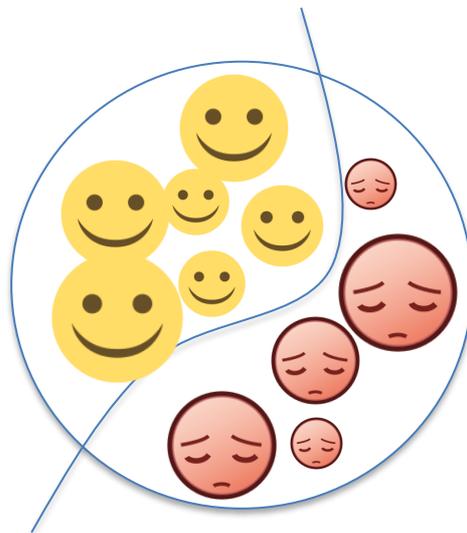
>> See the emoji activity on the next page.

Prayer ideas

- Pray for those in your group, or who you are aware of, who are experiencing grief at the moment.

The emoji guide to God and suffering

This exercise is a good way to help us process the possibly explanations for the suffering we experience in the world. Draw the following:



- The big circle represents the world. Now, does our experience of the world involve goodness, or evil? (Both! So draw the line down the middle and put happy faces on one side, and sad faces on the other).
- Each box represents a possible explanation for how God fits with this broken and divided world. Either work through them one by one, or get the group to suggest theories and draw the appropriate box as they suggest explanations.
- Biblically speaking, what are the strengths or weaknesses of each explanation? Which one(s) do you find most likely?

If you don't want to draw, you could get an artistic member of the group to do it. Or just print out a stack of emojis which you then arrange in the right order during the activity.

Note also: on the next page I've given references to other religions, but note that these are massive generalisations, and even within these religions there would be different understandings of these questions. The best bet when engaging with someone of another religion is to ask *them* how they think about these things.

Explanation of the boxes:

Emoji	Meaning	Strengths & weaknesses
[No emoji]	<p>There is no god (atheism*), and/or evil is an illusion based on our desires or attachments (Buddhism*).</p> <p><i>"In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." (Richard Dawkins, River Out of Eden)</i></p>	<p>This explains the random nature of our experience – some things are good, other things are bad, and there is no rhyme or reason to it.</p> <p>However, it does not adequately explain the <i>moral</i> dimension which is inherently part of our experience of the world (i.e., it fails to explain the outrage of evil). Biblically, evil is much more than just 'something I don't enjoy', and we rightly cry out for justice (Ps 13:1-2).</p>
	<p>God is evil.</p> <p>Or God is angry (Islam*), and our suffering is not evil but actually according to his will, e.g. as proper punishment.</p>	<p>This explains the bad things in the world, but it doesn't account for the good things we receive from him. Biblically, we know that God has gone to great lengths to bring humanity back to himself. It wouldn't make sense for him to do this if he is evil.</p> <p>On the other hand, the idea that God is punishing us is half true – the suffering we experience is partly a result of God's judgment on this world. But much of the suffering in the world is disproportionate, with the poor suffering more than the rich (Psalm 73, Luke 13:2).</p>
	<p>God is horrified by evil but he is not in control, or is otherwise unable to do prevent it (this is close to some types of Open Theism*).</p>	<p>This explains how God can be good but the world still be such a mess.</p> <p>However, it cannot be reconciled with the demonstration of God's power in creating the world (or indeed Jesus' power over suffering in John 11:37)</p>
 	<p>There are multiple gods (polytheistic religions*) or good and evil are rival forces (dualism*).</p>	<p>This explains the mix of good and evil, but it also makes evil 'natural', and gives little reason to hope that good will win over chaos in the end. It is incompatible with the biblical one God (Ps 96:5) who created the world good (Gen 1).</p>
 	<p>God is good so he mourns over evil and suffering, but has good reasons for allowing evil to continue for the moment. These reasons are partly revealed to us, but he also knows things we don't know.</p>	<p>This explains the incongruity of a good world marred by evil – while all the other explanations are 'stable' (i.e. the world just is the way we should expect it to be) this one is 'unstable' (things cannot stay how they are now). God has experienced suffering in this world, and mourns over it.</p> <p>While we have helpful clues as to what God is doing in the world (c.f. the fall, patience in judgment, the cross, the kingdom to come, etc) the hard thing about this view is that it requires us to trust God with what we don't know.</p>

21. John 12

Andrew Judd

Jesus has now performed seven signs and revealed his glory, but not everyone accepts him for who he is.

Getting started

Of all the signs we have seen Jesus do in John 1-12, which would you have liked to see personally, and why?

8. Water into wine (John 2)
9. Healing of the royal official's son (John 4)
10. Healing of the paralytic (John 5)
11. Feeding the 5000 (John 6)
12. Walking on water (John 6)
13. Healing the blind man (John 9)
14. Raising Lazarus (John 11)

Observation & interpretation

Divide the room into four, each group taking one of the Old Testament passages below. Study the passage then report back to the group what it might contribute to a first century Jew's expectations about the arrival of the Messiah.

1. Psalm 118
2. Zechariah 9:1-17
3. Isaiah 6:1-13
4. Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Read John 12:1-19

- What impact does raising Lazarus have?
- It seems extraordinary that the Pharisees are thinking of killing Lazarus. How might we explain this extreme reaction?

Read John 12:20-36

- Is Jesus reluctant to die?
- In verses 35-36, what is the light and dark that Jesus is referring to?
- Why might it be difficult for people to hear that the messiah will die?

Read John 12:37-50

- Why don't Jesus' signs convince all his people that he is the messiah?
- John says that the people 'could not believe' in Jesus' signs. Why not, do you think?

It is challenging to read about God hardening people's hearts in judgment. D. A. Carson helpfully makes these observations:

"In Isaiah 6 the prophet, after being granted a vision of the LORD that has resulted in his profound repentance and cleansing, offers to serve as the LORD's messenger. And so he is commissioned – but with the chilling prospect of being ignored, scorned and rejected by the people to whom he is to speak. God commands Isaiah to undertake this ministry in the full knowledge that the results will be negative; indeed, such preaching to these people evokes a negative response, is in some sense the cause of the negative response. In that sense God himself, through the prophet, hardens the heart of people – a point later recognized by the prophet when he begs the Almighty to display himself in more merciful ways (Is. 63:15-19). The assumption that God may judicially harden men and women frequently surfaces in the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 9:18; 2 Thes. 2:11). If a superficial reading finds this harsh, manipulative, even robotic, four things must constantly be borne in mind: (1) God's sovereignty in these matters is *never* pitted against human responsibility... (2) God's judicial hardening is not presented as the capricious manipulation of an arbitrary potentate cursing morally neutral or even morally pure being, but as a holy condemnation of a guilty people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen; (3) God's sovereignty in these matters can also be a cause for hope, for if he is *not* sovereign in these areas there is little point in petitioning him for help, while if he is sovereign the anguished plea of the prophet (Is. 63:15-19) – and of believers throughout the history of the church – make sense; (4) God's sovereign hardening of the people in Isaiah's day, his commissioning of Isaiah to apparently fruitless ministry, is a stage in God's 'strange work' (Is. 28:21-22) that brings God's ultimate redemptive purposes to pass." (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 448-49).

Implications

Sometimes people say that they need more evidence – that if Jesus did these signs before their eyes then they would believe. Do you think this is true? Why/why not?

Is this passage encouraging or discouraging for you as you think about sharing the gospel with your friends and family?

Take a moment to reflect back on this series in John 1-12. What is one thing that you have learned that is interesting, and what is one thing that you want to take away and put into practice in your life?

Maybe get the group to write these down on post-it notes and put the answers to each question at opposite ends of the room.

Prayer suggestions

Pray based on some of the things we have seen and learned in this series in John.

Pray for those we care about, as we seek to share something of Jesus' glory with them.