



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.®

Personal Study Guide

Winter 2022-23 | CSB



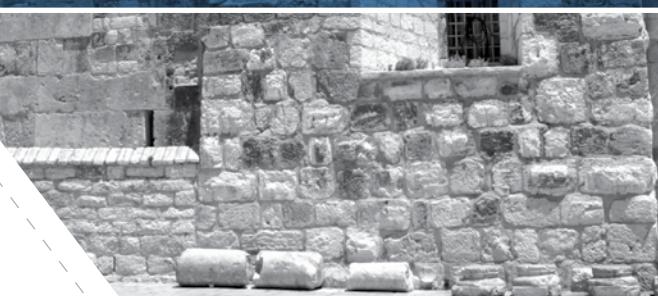
arkness; and
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rom God, whose
a witness, to bear
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the true Light, which lighteth
that cometh into the world.
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e came unto his own, and his own
ved him not.
But "as many as received him, to them
ave he power to become the sons of God,
even to them that believe on his name:
13^oWhich were born, not of blood, nor of
the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,
but of God.
14^oAnd the Word was made flesh, and
dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory,
the glory as of the only begotten of the
Father,) full of grace and truth.
JOHN'S WITNESS OF CHRIST
15 John bare witness of him, and cried,
saying, This is he of whom I spake, 'He
that cometh after me is preferred before
me: "for he was before me.
16 And of his fulness have all we received,
and grace for grace.
17 For the law was given by Moses, but
grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
18 ab No man hath seen God at any time;
or the only begotten Son, which is in the
bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

U N D E R S T A N D

E X P L O R E

A P P L Y

John 1-11



WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

In the old westerns, the good guys wore the white hats, while the villains dressed in black. On one hand, that kept things pretty simple. But, on the other hand, the best stories have a way of keeping us guessing. All of us have found ourselves shocked when a character we trusted turned out to be the enemy. And we've been pleasantly surprised to discover someone we despised was secretly working behind the scenes on behalf of the hero.

Unfortunately, what works well in books, in movies, or on television isn't so clear in real life. Sometimes, it's hard to know who's really on our side. We struggle to recognize people's true motives. When we guess wrong, the betrayal can cause indescribable hurt. We just want to know who we can trust.

Maybe that's why the apostle John was upfront in his Gospel. In a sense, he was simply telling the story of Jesus, just like Matthew, Mark, and Luke had done before him. But he also made it clear that the snippets of Jesus's life that he shared weren't just unfolding an interesting tale. They told readers exactly who Jesus was and what He was about.

In the first eleven chapters of his Gospel, John shared a lot of Jesus's teachings and described several of His miracles. But everything he wrote pointed in one direction. Jesus was the Son of God, come to earth. He was God in flesh, sent by the Father to pay the price for our sins. When we were at our worst, He arrived to offer living water, spiritual sight, and abundant life. Jesus is the undisputed hero of John's Gospel, and He can be trusted. If you're ready to accept His offer of salvation, here is what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

CONTENTS

FEATURES

Word Wise	6
Bible Reading Plan	7
Biblical Background	8
Sabbath Laws of the First Century	127
Coming Next Quarter	130



SESSIONS

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

<i>Dec. 4</i>	Session 1: In the Beginning (John 1:1-14)	10
<i>Dec. 11</i>	Session 2: Come and See (John 1:40-51)	19
<i>Dec. 18</i>	Session 3: I Will Raise (John 2:11-23)	28
<i>Dec. 25</i>	Session 4: You Will Find (Luke 2:1-15)	37
<i>Jan. 1</i>	Session 5: Everyone Who Believes* (John 3:4-18)	46
<i>Jan. 8</i>	Session 6: But Whoever Drinks (John 4:11-26)	55
<i>Jan. 15</i>	Session 7: Pick Up Your Mat (John 5:5-16)	64
<i>Jan. 22</i>	Session 8: I Am the Bread (John 6:26-40)	73
<i>Jan. 29</i>	Session 9: He Sent Me (John 7:14-29)	82
<i>Feb. 5</i>	Session 10: I Am the Light (John 8:3-18)	91
<i>Feb. 12</i>	Session 11: You Have Seen Him (John 9:24-38)	100
<i>Feb. 19</i>	Session 12: I Know My Own (John 10:7-14,25-30)	109
<i>Feb. 26</i>	Session 13: I Am the Resurrection (John 11:32-46)	118

* Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITER

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. Read Lifeway's full doctrinal guideline online at lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline. The Key Doctrine statements in this study guide are adapted from these guidelines.

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FROM THE TEAM

Most of us have something we experienced we wish we could put in print. Others may have shared about that event already but did so from their perspective. What they said was correct, but we may feel a need to help people go deeper into that story or event or get a fresh look at it.

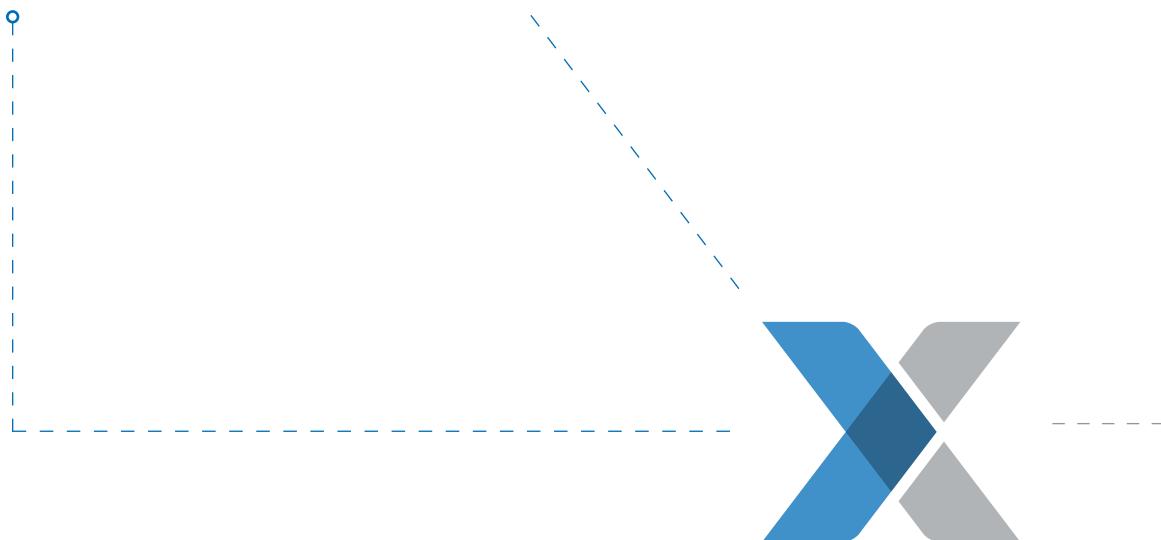
Mark recorded Peter's recollections about Jesus. Luke shared what he gleaned from interviews with eyewitnesses to the events surrounding Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection. Matthew, an eyewitness, shared what he knew and saw. It appears that John wrote his account after Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While the others wrote more of a chronological account, John appears to have given attention to stories that brought focus to Jesus being the revealed Christ, the promised Messiah. John even tells us there were more stories to be told (John 21:25) that he did not include. We could find some of those in the other Gospel accounts. John was writing to help his readers go deeper into the story so that they would believe in Jesus.

In the months ahead, we will be looking at the stories John included in his Gospel account. Some of these stories only appear in John's account, helping us get a deeper understanding of the identity of Jesus. Our prayer is that we will get a fresh glimpse of Jesus during this study and gain confidence that He is the promised Messiah who came to offer us abundant life.

Onward,

G. Dwayne McCrary

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WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Bethany—a town two miles southeast of Jerusalem (John 11:18); home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1)

Bethesda [buh THEZ duh]—a pool in Jerusalem where Jesus healed a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years (John 5:2)

Bethsaida [beth-SAY ih duh]—a fishing village on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee; hometown of Andrew, Peter, and Philip (John 1:44)

Cana—a city in Galilee near Nazareth, where Jesus changed water into wine (John 2:1), where a royal official asked Jesus to heal his son (John 4:46), and the home of Nathanael (John 21:2)

Capernaum [kuh PUHR nay uhm]—a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee; Jesus's home base after John the Baptist's imprisonment (Matt. 4:12-13)

Cephas [SEE fuhs]—Aramaic word meaning “rock,” translated *Petros* (Peter) in Greek; nickname given by Jesus to Simon (John 1:42)

Galilee—small region in northern Israel where Jesus grew up, chose His disciples, and did much of His ministry

Gerizim [GEHR uh zim]—a mountain which the Samaritans believed was the proper place of worship (John 4:20); 400 years before Christ the Samaritans had built a temple on Mount Gerizim, it was destroyed by the Jews in 128 BC.

Nathanael [nuh THAN ay uhl]—one of the twelve apostles, from Cana of Galilee; Philip announced to Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah (John 1:45); some equate Nathaniel with Bartholomew (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13)

Nazareth [NAZ uh reth]—Jesus's hometown (Luke 2:39-40; 4:16); a small, insignificant village (John 1:45-46) located in Galilee about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea

Samaritans—Israelites of the Northern Kingdom who stayed in the land after the Assyrian exile and intermarried with Gentiles became known as the Samaritans. In the days of Jesus, the relationship between Jews and Samaritans was greatly strained (John 4:9), Jews avoided contact with Samaritans whenever possible.

BIBLE READING PLAN

DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. John 1:1-5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. John 5:36-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. John 8:42-47
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. John 1:6-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. John 5:41-47	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. John 8:48-53
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BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

By the end of the first century, five Christian writings in circulation were attributed to John, who was a disciple of Jesus. One was an account of the revelation the Lord gave him while exiled on Patmos. Three were short letters addressed to early believers. The fifth is the Gospel John wrote with the intent of his readers coming to “believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [they] may have life in his name” (John 20:31). Christian scholars generally agree John wrote his Gospel while living in Ephesus, late in the first century. This quarter we will be looking at the first half of John’s Gospel (chaps. 1–11); next quarter, we will study chapters 12–21.

John’s Gospel unfolds scenes from the life of Jesus in a way that is simple, straightforward, and yet theologically profound. Four words help highlight major themes that John developed in his Gospel.

- **Logos**—John used this term, which English translations render as “Word,” to highlight the divinity of Jesus (1:1,14). Christ’s divinity is a central topic in John’s Gospel. He explicitly referred to Jesus as “God” (1:1,18; 20:28). Affirming the divinity of Jesus, John included seven “I Am” statements Jesus made. When Jesus used this title, He was echoing the name God revealed for Himself when speaking to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:13-15).
- **Love**—John used the word *love* more than any other book in the New Testament. The first mention occurs in John 3:16, a verse that encapsulates the gospel message. The Gospel of John teaches that the Father loves the Son (3:35), the Son loves the Father (14:31), the Father loves those that love His Son (14:23), and Jesus loved His disciples and His friends (11:5; 13:1; 11:3,36; 11:5). Those who are Christ’s followers are to love one another (13:34).
- **Light**—John’s Gospel also speaks of “light” more than any other New Testament book. The book opens by explaining that Jesus, the Word, came as the light that “shines in the darkness” and is the “true light that gives light to everyone” (1:5,9). John’s Gospel contrasts light with darkness. In doing so, John contrasted good and evil (3:19-21) and explained that Jesus came as the “light of the world” (8:12; 9:5).
- **Life**—Finally, John spoke of “life” more than any other book in the New Testament and over two times more than the other three Gospels combined. John’s Gospel typically refers to “life” not in a physical sense but in a spiritual sense, meaning the abundant and eternal life that is available in Christ alone. This quarter’s study opens with the declaration that all things were created through Christ and that life is in Him (1:3-4). It closes with the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from death to life (11:1-44).

OUTLINE

I. Prelude: Christ as the Eternal Word (1:1-18)

- A. The Word (1:1)
- B. The Word and Creation (1:2-5)
- C. The Word and the World (1:6-18)

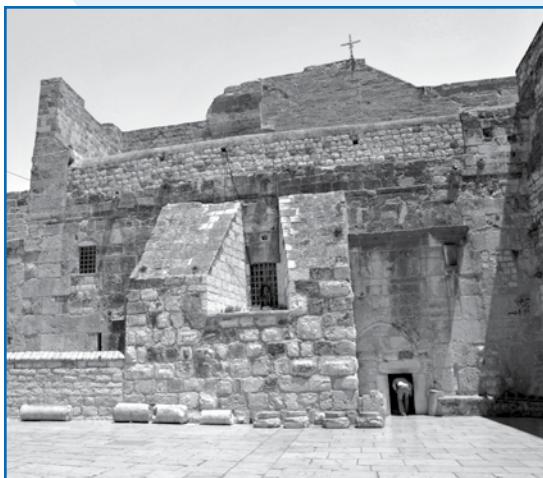
II. Presentation: Christ as the Son of God (1:19-12:50)

- A. By John the Baptizer (1:19-34)
- B. To His Disciples (1:35-51)
- C. Through Miraculous Signs (2:1-12:50)

III. Preparation: Instruction of the Twelve by the Son of God (13:1-17:26)

IV. Passion: Suffering of Christ as the Son of God (18:1-20:31)

V. Postlude: The Continuing Work of the Son of God (21:1-25)



ON THE COVER

The Door of Humility—the small entrance to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. John's Gospel affirms that Jesus, the baby born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7), is the eternal Son of God who took on human flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1,14). (See Session 1.)



In the Beginning

Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh.

JOHN 1:1-14

Many people think of Bethlehem as the beginning place for Jesus. The babe in a manger tugs at our hearts. But to appreciate what happened in Bethlehem, we must travel back through time eternal. Then, we may understand Jesus was God the Son—co-eternal, co-equal, and co-existent with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The baby of Bethlehem was the eternal God who took on human flesh to save human beings.

How does knowing a person's beginnings impact how you view them?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 1:1-18

John's Gospel is a historical narrative of Jesus's ministry. John, who wrote the Gospel, was raised with his brother James in Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Their mother's name was Salome. Their father, Zebedee, owned a fishing business. Simon and Andrew worked with them (Matt. 27:56; Mark 1:20; Luke 5:10). One day, while James and John were preparing the fishing nets with their father, Jesus called the two to follow Him. Some biblical scholars believe John was the youngest of the twelve apostles.

John did not begin his Gospel with the birth narrative but by declaring Jesus to be God. His prologue (John 1:1-18) contains four evidences for Jesus's deity. First, Jesus was and is eternal (vv. 1-2). While Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us, He existed as God before time began. We cannot fully understand how God can be one God yet three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet God's Word declares it to be true. That's where John began his Gospel. He didn't try to explain it; he simply proclaimed it.

Second, Jesus is the Creator (v. 3). Genesis began with the pre-existent God who created all things. John started there as well. As the Word, Jesus not only was with God, He was God. John declared that everything came into being through Him.

Third, God sent forth a special witness—John the Baptist—to prepare the way for Jesus (vv. 6-9). The Baptizer bore witness to the Life that was the Light of humanity—a light that can never be overcome.

A fourth argument for the deity of Christ can be found in His incarnation (vv. 10-18). The Word took on human flesh and dwelt among the people for whom He would die. As one of the Twelve, John had seen Him with his eyes, touched Him, heard Him, and walked with Him for over three years. John was a firsthand witness of the incarnate God who lived among His people.

As you read through John 1:1-14, number the descriptors used for Jesus. What do these descriptors reveal about Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WAS THE WORD (JOHN 1:1-5)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

VERSES 1-2

In the beginning were words Jewish readers would have instantly associated with the opening words of the Book of Genesis. Jews commonly referred to books of the Bible by their first few words, thus they called Genesis, “In the beginning.”

Not until near the end of John’s Gospel do readers find out why he penned his Gospel: that people would believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him, they would gain eternal life (see 20:31). John wrote not merely to give an account of Jesus’s life and ministry. He wrote so that his readers might believe and experience life—eternal and abundant. Led by the Holy Spirit, John offered a theological retrospective of Jesus.

The opening phrase, ***In the beginning was the Word***, affirms the Word’s existence from eternity past. Why did John speak of *the Word*? Jews understood that God’s Word has power. God spoke and universes came into existence (Gen. 1:3,6-7,9; Ps. 33:6). Healing came through His Word (Ps. 107:20). God’s Word accomplishes what He intends (Isa. 55:10-11).

John also answered Greek philosophical thought, which taught that the Word (in Greek, *logos*) was abstract and impersonal. Stoics believed *logos* was an unknowable principle or force that gave purpose and stability to the universe. John’s Gospel stands in opposition to this teaching.

To say ***the Word was with God*** affirmed the Word’s existence prior to creation. John made a final connection of the Word’s eternal existence by saying ***the Word was God***. John was speaking of the Second Member of the Godhead and laying the foundation for the

existence of the Trinity. Paul likewise declared Jesus's divinity: "For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ" (Col 2:9). In verse 2, John reiterated and thus reemphasized the theme of verse 1, the eternal existence of the Word.

Why was it important for John to emphasize that Jesus existed before time?

VERSE 3-5

Having established the Word's eternal existence, John explained His activity from the beginning using a positive statement and a negative one. Positively, the Word **created** all things; negatively, nothing was created apart from Him. John's declaration again echoes Genesis 1, which states, "In the beginning God created" (v. 1). Genesis 1:1 shows God's dual nature: He is and He does. In the same way, the Word is and the Word does; He existed from the beginning and He creates. The New Testament elsewhere proclaims Jesus as the Creator (Col. 1:16-17).

In verses 3-5, John introduced words that serve as themes in his Gospel: **life**, **light**, and **darkness**. These themes represent both the promise and the problem of creation and of God's new creation. Just as God was the origin of light and life in Genesis, so John declared the Word to be the same. As Creator, Jesus is the origin and sustainer of physical light and life. As Redeemer, He is the origin and sustainer of spiritual light and life. John's declaration that life was **in him** reinforces the reality of Jesus's eternal and self-existing nature (see 5:26).

Jesus came as **light** because humans are prone to wander in **darkness**. In verse 5, John introduced the dichotomy of light and darkness, which represent good and evil. John 3:19 says, "The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil." Thus, in his Prologue, John was contrasting the darkness of fallen humanity with the glory of the Word that came as the light.

When introducing the subject of light, John included an element of hope. Since the garden of Eden, the forces of evil have tried to destroy life and obscure the light. Darkness, though, did not win or **overcome** it. As the rest of John's Gospel will show—neither did death.

**What was the significance of pointing out Jesus's role in creation?
How does that reinforce John's argument?**

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Christ is the eternal Son of God. (See Matt. 16:16; Phil. 2:5-22.)

MADE KNOWN (JOHN 1:6-8)

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

VERSES 6-8

John interrupted his declarations about the light to feature the one who was a messenger or **witness** of that light **whose name was John**. In establishing the background for the arrival of the Light, John the Gospel writer first introduced John the Baptizer.

John was **sent from God**. As had occurred with Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament, John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, conceived when they were older (Gen. 21:1-3; Luke 1:7-25). Through Abraham, God established His covenant; with John the Baptist, God was introducing His new covenant. John's Jewish readers would have recognized the significance of the Baptizer being *sent from God*. This verb placed him on the level of Moses and the Old Testament prophets, each of whom the Lord sent with His message (Ex. 3:10-15; Isa. 6:8; Jer. 1:4-10; 25:4). Further, the Jews would have recognized that John's being sent was a fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy about sending a messenger to clear the way for the Messiah (Mal 3:1). Thus, John the Baptist's arrival and proclamation were an integral part of God's plan.

Using courtroom terminology, the Gospel explains John came to testify not about himself but about **the light**. He came to testify about who the Word was and why He came into the world. Throughout

John's Gospel, more of these witnesses step forward with the same intent. Not only did John the Baptizer have a message, he had a mission—***that all might believe through him.***

The readers of John's Gospel would have included both Jews and Gentiles. The emphasis on John the Baptist's preaching so that all might believe was good news. Regardless of one's ethnicity, socio-economic status, or age, all were (and are) invited to believe.

Using repetition, John's Gospel declared emphatically that the Baptizer was ***not the light*** himself; light and life came only through the One he would soon baptize. Like John, believers are messengers sent to tell others about the Light. Being a witness for Jesus is not complicated. We simply tell others what we have discovered about Jesus, how He brought life and light into our lives, and how He can do the same for them.

How might believers help other people believe in Jesus?

IN THE FLESH (JOHN 1:9-14)

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, ¹³ who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

VERSE 9-13

John the Gospel writer revealed truth in layers. He revealed the Word—but not by name. Similarly, he introduced John as a witness to the arrival of the Word—but told us nothing of John's ministry or work. John was setting the stage to write about the main character of his Gospel. Picking up on the theme of the Word as light, John described Him as the ***true light***. The word *true* carries the idea of

being authentic, dependable, and complete. In saying the true light **gives light to everyone**, John was not claiming that all would embrace the light. In fact, not all would. Rather, he was explaining that the light was intended for all and would be available for all to embrace.

Stating that the light **was coming into the world**, John was emphasizing some of the messianic expectations of the first-century Jews (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5; Zech. 9:9). Additionally, he was indicating that the light would be coming in a physical form. This was quite the contrast to the philosophers' teaching that the *logos* was abstract and unknowable. In physical form, the light would be personal, tangible, and knowable.

John typically used *world* not to describe the planet that spins in space but to refer to the realm where people live, with the emphasis being on the people—fallen, rebellious, and immoral people. When the Word appeared, mankind as a whole **did not recognize him**. Thus, people missed the opportunity to know Him.

John moved from the larger context of the world and zeroed in on the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who likewise, as a whole, **did not receive him**. This phrase means they did not take hold of Him. Tragically, the Creator came to His creation and they did not welcome Him.

Those **who did receive him** received something in return. They received it not as a reward; it was something he **gave**. He gave them **the right** or the authority, to be the children of God. In becoming one of His children, people experienced a change of status.

John explained to his readers how that change in status occurs: those who believed and received. Yet John was clear, this was a result of what God had done. It was not by family heritage, human action, or some religious act, but because of the will of God; “it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8b-9).

VERSE 14

Christians often speak of Jesus's incarnation, which refers to His coming to earth in human form. The word *incarnation* comes from *incarnatus*, which is Latin for “made flesh.” Verse 14 is the clearest statement about the incarnation in the New Testament. It and verse 1 stand together like regal bookends, proclaiming that the Word was God in human form.

God's Son stepped across the threshold of eternity to dwell ***among us***. The Greek word translated ***dwelt*** literally means "to tabernacle," to set up His residence with us. In the Old Testament, the Hebrews understood the tabernacle to be the location where God met His people (Ex. 25:8). In the same way, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us was and is the center of God's presence for His people.

John could remember when he laid aside his nets; when he saw the blind, crippled, and deaf healed; saw dead raised to life; and saw Jesus transfigured and standing beside Moses and Elijah. John could remember Jesus's **glory**, which the Father had manifest in His **one and only Son**—who came to reveal God's **grace and truth**. The imagery is reminiscent of God in His glory passing in front of Moses and revealing His love and faithfulness (Ex. 34:5-7).

The Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, revealing God's glory, was the exact opposite of the Greek and Roman gods that were imaginary, unapproachable, and unknowable. God's only Son came to earth in human form. He invites us to follow Him and behold His glory as He works in our lives and in our midst.

How does Jesus becoming human demonstrate the glory of God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

Review additional passages in John's Gospel about Christ's deity. Read John 4:26; 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; and 17:5-11. Why is it important that we understand Jesus as God the Son and not merely the Son of God? How does John consistently point to the deity of Jesus?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can face the future knowing Jesus created all.
- Believers are messengers sent to tell others about the Light.
- Faith in Jesus secures a person's place in God's family.

Discuss as a group ways of affirming Jesus being God the Son in human flesh during this Christmas season. How can the group make sure that every class or group activity reinforces this truth?

The ancient philosophers believed the *logos* (Word) was distant and aloof. Are there areas of your life where you keep Jesus at arm's length? What steps do you need to take to allow Him to move closer to you?

PRAYER NEEDS



Come and See

Jesus wants people to follow Him in faith and truth.

JOHN 1:40-51

Most of us are a little skeptical when it comes to promises made to us, with our experiences getting in the way. We want to trust the one making the promise or their product, but we've been let down too many times. We just can't do it. Some people approach spiritual matters with this same hopeful skepticism, keeping their distance due to past experiences. The best response we can make may very well be to come and see, which is what the early followers of Jesus told others as well.

How does a person's past experiences get in the way of them following Jesus?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 1:19-51

Jesus's encounter with His earliest disciples occurred during the ministry of John the Baptist. John was the forerunner of the Messiah. Many people wondered if he was the Christ, but John never aspired to an office that was not his. Representatives from the Jewish leaders confronted John over his authority to baptize (John 1:19-25).

John baptized with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. In humility, John acknowledged he was not even worthy to untie the Messiah's sandals. Consequently, when Jesus asked to be baptized, John initially refused but then consented (Matt. 3:13-17). John testified that he witnessed the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus as the voice of God declared Him to be God's Son. Afterward, John pointed his followers to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Messiah (John 1:29).

Two of these disciples immediately left John and followed Jesus. One of them was Andrew. After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew became convinced Jesus was indeed the Christ. He took this good news to his brother and brought Simon to Jesus. This encounter was the first of several meetings that culminated in a change in Simon's identity and purpose as the fisherman became Peter, the fisher of men (1:35-42).

Leaving the Jordan where John baptized, Jesus traveled northward to Galilee, probably accompanied by Peter and Andrew. They lived in Bethsaida on the northern side of the Sea of Galilee. Arriving in their hometown, Jesus invited Philip, who also lived in Bethsaida, to follow him. Like Andrew, Philip's first reaction was to find another friend—Nathaniel—and to introduce him to Jesus. At first, Nathaniel was skeptical, but upon meeting Jesus, he quickly became a believer that Jesus was Christ (1:43-51).

As you read John 1:40-51 in your Bible, underline the names and titles that people apply to Jesus. What do these titles and names reveal about the person who attributed them to Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ANDREW AND PETER (JOHN 1:40-42)

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed him. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah”, (which is translated “the Christ”), ⁴² and he brought Simon to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, he said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated “Peter”).

VERSE 40

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he proclaimed Him to be “the Lamb of God” (v. 36). Two of John’s disciples heard what he said and began to follow Jesus. One who followed Jesus was **Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother**. Most biblical scholars believe the other was John, the one who wrote this Gospel. This possibility is bolstered by the fact that John referred to himself elsewhere in the Gospel—but not by name (18:15; 19:26-27). Sometimes he called himself “the disciple Jesus loved” (13:23; 21:7,20).

The two **followed** Jesus. This verb was commonly used in the teacher/student or rabbi/disciple relationship. Rabbis typically walked while they taught; thus their disciples were considered “followers.” To be a follower meant the student had made a commitment to his teacher and his teacher’s doctrine.

VERSES 41-42

Andrew’s **first** priority was to find his **brother Simon** and tell him they had found the Messiah. Jews of the first century longed for the Messiah. They were looking for someone to destroy their enemies—the Romans—and to restore David’s kingdom. Jews based this on God’s promise to David (2 Sam. 7:16) and other Old Testament prophecies (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5). Andrew’s statement was certainly a triumphant proclamation: **We have found the Messiah.**

Andrew was not content to tell Simon what he had learned from Jesus; rather, he **brought** him. The term *brought* carries the idea of leading, as in leading an animal. We can imagine Andrew excitedly talking and encouraging Simon every step of the way.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism and Missions*

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle.
(See Isaiah 6:8; Acts 1:8.)

Evangelism involves introducing people to Jesus. Telling family members about Jesus can be challenging. We may be afraid they will reject not only the message but also the messenger. Andrew's action serves as a model and motivator for us to introduce family members to Christ.

Jesus proclaimed that Simon would be called •*Cephas*, the Aramaic word “Rock,” which in Greek is *Petros* and Anglicized as “Peter.” *Simon* was a common first-century name; six other men in the Gospels have it. No other man in the New Testament, though, is named “Peter.” This was not a proper name but a nickname—one this disciple would eventually live up to as he boldly proclaimed, lived for, and ultimately died for the resurrected Christ.

How does meeting Jesus give a person a new identity?

PHILIP (JOHN 1:43-46)

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. He found Philip and told him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.” ⁴⁶ “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked him. “Come and see,” Philip answered.

VERSES 43-46

Jesus left the area where John had been baptizing and headed to Galilee. Once there, He **found** Philip, which meant He went looking

for Philip. ***Follow me*** carries with it the understanding of an ongoing commitment to follow Jesus as a disciple.

Although Simon and Andrew lived in Capernaum at the time Jesus began His ministry (Mark 1:21-30), they grew up in •**Bethsaida** and considered it their hometown. Bethsaida overlooks the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Its name translates “House of Fish,” an indication it was a fishing village.

Philip could not wait to tell his friend •**Nathanael** about Jesus. In using the plural pronoun, ***we have found***, Philip was including himself among Jesus’s followers.

DID YOU KNOW?

The other Gospels refer to Nathanael as Bartholomew; only in John is he called Nathanael. Bartholomew translates as “Son of Tolmai,” which would have been his surname. Nathanael means “God has given.” The only other information John gave about Nathanael was that he was from Cana of Galilee (21:2).

Philip linked Jesus’s identity with what ***Moses wrote about in the law***. He may have been referring to Moses’s prophecy that God would “raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among your own brothers. . . . I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him” (Deut. 18:15-18). Or Philip may have been speaking more generally about Jesus as the fulfillment of the law and ***the prophets***, meaning all the Old Testament had said about the Messiah. Regardless, in connecting Jesus with Moses and the prophets, Philip was declaring Jesus to be the Messiah, a theme in John’s Gospel.

Philip also referred to Jesus as ***the son of Joseph, from •Nazareth***. Nazareth was a small village that lacked culture and may have been morally lax. Nathanael’s question about whether ***anything good*** could come from Nazareth likely had nothing to do with the village’s reputation. It was probably based on the fact that Nazareth was an insignificant village that was not mentioned in the Old Testament or in any other Jewish writings that foretold the coming Messiah. Surely the Messiah could not come from such an obscure place!

In response to Nathanael's question, Philip said simply: **Come and see.** Philip was confident that if Nathanael could just meet Jesus, he too would be convinced Jesus was the Messiah.

What keeps people from believing that Jesus is the promised Messiah?

How might a person's preconceived notions about Jesus affect his or her willingness to follow Him?

NATHANAEL (JOHN 1:47-51)

⁴⁷ Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” ⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” Jesus answered. ⁴⁹ “Rabbi,” Nathanael replied, “You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰ Jesus responded to him, “Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” ⁵¹ Then he said, “Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

VERSES 47-49

Jesus revealed that He knew the purity of Nathanael's heart, in which there was **no deceit**. The earliest Greek writers used the word translated *deceit* to refer to bait. In time, it referred to anything that was cunning. Additionally, by detailing that Nathanael **truly is an Israelite**, Jesus affirmed he was a man of genuine faith, not a man who was content merely to observe Jewish rules and rituals.

Jesus's response astonished Nathanael. His question—**How do you know me?**—was more than “Have we met before?” Jesus had seen into Nathanael's very core. **Under the fig tree** was an idiom. Since people couldn't gather a crop from a fig tree or a grapevine for some years after it was planted, being able to sit under it indicated a prolonged period

of peace. It meant the plants had not been destroyed by war. The Old Testament described an era of peace by saying, “Throughout Solomon’s reign, Judah and Israel lived in safety from Dan to Beer-sheba, each person under his own vine and his own fig tree” (1 Kings 4:25). By the New Testament era, the phrase had come to refer to the place where men of faith, especially rabbis, could study the law in tranquility and in the relative comfort that the fig tree’s shade provided. To say that He had seen Nathanael *under the fig tree* was Jesus’s way of acknowledging that Nathanael was a dedicated student of the Word.

Nathanael, who had been skeptical that anything good could come from Nazareth, made a great declaration of faith about Jesus’s true identity. Nathanael proclaimed that standing before him was none other than the **Son of God** and the long-anticipated **King of Israel**. In this one exclamation, Nathanael encapsulated what John had been building to in this first chapter—Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.

What role does fulfilled prophecy play in a person’s willingness to trust Jesus?

VERSES 50-51

What Philip had trusted would happen indeed happened—Jesus and Nathanael had connected on a deep level. Jesus, though, was about to take it to a deeper level. As He had spoken about Nathanael’s past, He was about to speak about his future—and the rest of His disciples’ future as well.

Jesus promised Nathanael he would see even **greater things**. Indeed, just a few sentences later, John in his Gospel began to tell of Jesus and His disciples going to Cana, where Jesus would conduct His first miracle. Jesus’s promise to Nathanael of greater things was about to begin.

In verse 51, Jesus shifted from talking to Nathanael and began addressing the group. The pronoun **you** changes in verse 51 to plural; Jesus began speaking to all of His followers.

He spoke of **heaven** opening and **angels of God ascending and descending** on Him, **the Son of Man**. In speaking of angels ascending

and descending, Jesus was referencing a scene from the life of Jacob. In Genesis, Jacob had a dream in which angels were going up and down a stairway between heaven and the earth. Jacob was confident that he was standing at the very gates of heaven that day (Gen. 28:16-17). He was so moved by his dream that he changed the name of the place where he had the dream from Luz to Bethel, which means “House of God.”

Jesus was telling His disciples that God would no longer reveal Himself in a certain location; He was going to reveal Himself in Jesus, the Son of Man. Jesus came to connect heaven and earth.

At the end of the chapter, John's first readers were left with the conclusion that the opening verses declared: the eternal Word had become flesh (John 1:14). After Jesus called these men, their lives were never the same. He may have called the least likely, but these men would turn "the world upside down" with the gospel (Acts 17:6). The good news is that Jesus still calls us to follow Him.

How does Jesus offer His followers assurance that He is the Son of God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Connect Old Testament prophecy to New Testament fulfillment*

Study the following passages and relate each to an aspect of fulfillment in Jesus's life: Genesis 3:15; 12:3; Deuteronomy 18:15; Numbers 24:17; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14; 9:7; 53:3; and Jeremiah 31:15. What aspects of Jesus are identified that prove He is the Christ, the Son of God? How do these verses make a case that Jesus was the Messiah?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Our true identity is found in following Jesus.
- Believers must lovingly challenge others' false beliefs about Jesus.
- Believers can be assured of the truth of Jesus's identity.

Discuss with your Bible study group some of the misconceptions people have about the identity of Jesus. What actions might your group take in light of these misconceptions and concerns?

Each of the men in these verses became followers of Jesus. Have you also become one of His followers? If so, who else do you need to invite to follow Him? If not, what is your biggest hindrance from doing so? What actions do you need to take that demonstrate you are following Jesus?

PRAYER NEEDS

SESSION 3



I Will Raise

Jesus brought honor to the Father in word and deed.

JOHN 2:11-23

While driving, we may see a sign that indicates what is on the next exit. That sign is not the entity it advertises but points beyond itself to a restaurant, hotel, or other attraction we may want to visit. John wrote his Gospel so readers “may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [they] may have life in his name” (20:31). The signs in John’s Gospel point to Jesus being the Messiah, the Son of God.

What signs stand out to you when driving on a highway? How do those signs help you make decisions along the way?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 2:1-25

The first of Jesus's signs was performed at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. This city was located near His hometown of Nazareth. Apparently, Jesus's mother was close to the family of the couple being married. Mary, Jesus, His disciples, and probably His entire family were invited. At some point in the festivities, the wedding party ran out of wine. It is curious that Mary came to Jesus with this need. It was not His problem. In fact, He asked His mother what the situation had to do with Him. Nevertheless, He quietly performed a miracle, turning water into wine. The headwaiter declared this wine to be superior to what had been served previously. In this simple act, Jesus displayed His glory and His disciples believed in Him (John 2:1-11).

John 2:13-17 describes the scene of Jesus expelling the money changers and merchants from the temple courtyard. The other Gospel writers place the cleansing of the temple after Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, less than a week before His crucifixion. Some scholars argue these narratives described two separate events—one at the beginning of His earthly ministry and one near the end. Other commentators point out that John was not interested in presenting a chronological account of Jesus's activities. They contend the incident occurred only once and John included it earlier for theological reasons. Since John's primary purpose was to help readers believe in Jesus, we could understand this placement.

The temple scene ends with Jesus's prophesy that if the temple were destroyed, He would raise it in three days. He was speaking about the resurrection of His crucified body. After His resurrection, the disciples recalled His statement and believed in Him (2:18-23).

As you read John 2:11-23, underline details that might seem symbolic in nature. What was John trying to communicate with the details he included?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GLORY SHOWN (JOHN 2:11-12)

¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. ¹² After this, he went down to Capernaum, together with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.

VERSES 11-12

Jesus and His family attended a wedding *in •Cana of •Galilee* (2:1). Mary told Jesus that the groom's family had run out of wine. She expected Him to do something to remedy the situation as evidenced by her instruction to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5). Nearby were six stone jars; each held twenty to thirty gallons. After Jesus had the servants fill the jars with water, He turned it to wine. Not knowing where the wine had come from, the headwaiter commended the groom for serving the better wine this late in the week-long celebration.

What did *this, the first of his signs* point to? It pointed to Jesus's superiority over Jewish law. For Jews, seven was the number of completion; six represented incompleteness. The six unfilled purification jars (2:6) symbolized the inadequacy of what had become essentially Jewish rituals. Turning the jars full of water into wine indicated Jesus would be offering something new—and it would be far better and more satisfying than anyone had anticipated.

DID YOU KNOW?

The seven signs in John's Gospel that point to Jesus's identity are (1) turning water into wine (2:1-11); (2) healing an official's son (4:46-54); (3) healing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-15); (4) feeding the 5,000 (6:5-14); (5) walking on water (6:16-21); (6) healing the man born blind (9:1-7); and (7) raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45).

The sign also ***revealed his glory***. It showed Jesus's ability to do the impossible and His willingness to meet tangible human needs. It highlighted His compassion for people in helpless situations.

Jesus—not the wine or the wedding—is the focus of the story. Mary is simply called ***his mother***. None of the disciples or members of the wedding party are named. The spotlight is on Jesus alone. Because of what He had done, His disciples ***believed in him***. The word *believed* is the verb form of “faith”—thus Jesus’s disciples “faithed” in Him. Something deep inside profoundly changed because of what they witnessed.

Believers should see Jesus working even in the smaller things. Too often, we want to see great miracles to bolster our faith. Jesus warned against joining the wicked generation that demands a sign (Matt. 16:4). God involves Himself in the ordinary aspects of our lives, yet with extraordinary results.

How does Jesus reveal His glory to us today?

WORSHIP EXPECTED (JOHN 2:13-17)

¹³ The Jewish Passover was near, and so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and he also found the money changers sitting there. ¹⁵ After making a whip out of cords, he drove everyone out of the temple with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling doves, “Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!” ¹⁷ And his disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for your house will consume me.

VERSES 13-14

Jesus **went up to Jerusalem** (an elevation of about 2,600 feet) for ***the Jewish Passover***. Passover commemorated the Jews being spared the night the Egyptians' firstborn males were killed throughout the land and the Israelites subsequently being released from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 11–12).

The number of people visiting Jerusalem for Passover in Jesus's day would have been about half a million, five times the city's regular population. The city would have been bustling with people who were there for the celebration.

The **temple** included not only the Jewish sanctuary but the surrounding courtyards as well. As worshipers neared the altar, they could purchase **oxen, sheep, and doves**, which they would offer as a sacrifice. Having the animals available there in Jerusalem was convenient, especially for those who had traveled a long way.

Jesus's problem was not with what type of animals the people were selling. The Old Testament mentioned these animals being given as burnt offerings (Lev. 5:6-7; Num. 7:1-8). The Scripture does not even say the merchants were selling the animals at exorbitant prices. Nor was Jesus offended that **money changers** were exchanging currencies. Based on Exodus 30:13, Jewish men were expected to pay a temple tax of a half-shekel each year. This tax could not be paid in foreign currencies, which often had the images of pagan rulers or symbols. The money had to be exchanged for the appropriate temple currency.

Jesus was enraged because people had turned His **Father's house into a marketplace**. Rather than hearing the songs, praises, and prayers of sincere worshipers, those at the temple were forced to hear the constant bleating, mooing, stomping, fluttering, and cooing of sacrificial animals. Rather than the solemnity that one would expect at the holiest place in Judaism, one heard coins clanging and people haggling, talking, and laughing. This was anything but worshipful.

Amplifying the offense, the merchants set up their tables in the court of the Gentiles. This massive outer courtyard could accommodate about 75,000 people; it was as close as Gentiles were allowed to get to the altar and holy of holies. Merchants were thus prohibiting a whole group of people from having a genuine worship experience at the temple. Mark, in recording this event, stated that Jesus said, "Is it not written, my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?" (Mark 11:17, emphasis added).

What are some ways people show disregard for worship today?

VERSES 15-17

Jesus responded not with a flare of human anger but with the deliberate action of righteous indignation. Although all four Gospel writers record this event, only John specified that Jesus made **a whip**. The text does not say Jesus struck anyone. The term **drove** implies an element of force but not necessarily physical violence. Nor should the word **everyone** be taken to include the worshipers, since this term is associated with the phrase **their sheep and oxen**. Totally disrupting their business, Jesus forcefully ran off the beasts and birds, the merchants and money changers.

Jesus wanted to remove all barriers that would keep people from experiencing genuine worship. His actions reminded the disciples of David's **zeal** to experience God's presence in His **house** (see Ps. 69:9).

BIBLE SKILL: *Examine Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament.*

John pointed to Psalm 69:9 when the disciples reflected on the removal of the merchants and money changers. Read Psalm 69 and note other places the Psalm is quoted in the New Testament. How do the other quotes relate to the point being made in John 2 if any? How does reading Psalm 69 give a deeper understanding of the events taking place in John 2?

Jesus's **disciples** did not participate in His actions against the sellers of animals or the money changers. Perhaps they were stunned into being silent spectators. Still, they **remembered** the Scripture about how zeal for God's house would consume Him (Ps. 69:9).

Believers must worship God in Spirit and truth. The purpose of the sacrificial system ended with the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God who died for our sins. As we worship God, believers demonstrate sincerity by focusing on Jesus rather than trying to make worship conform to what pleases us.

How does proper worship help us maintain a right relationship with God?

SIGN REMEMBERED (JOHN 2:18-23)

¹⁸ So the Jews replied to him, “What sign will you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.” ²⁰ Therefore the Jews said, “This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² So when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made. ²³ While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing.

VERSES 18-21

Wanting some validation of Jesus's authority to do what He had done, the Jews demanded a **sign**. He responded with what Jews called a *mashal*, meaning a riddle or parable. The riddle confused those who heard His words. Those who read them in John's Gospel, though, understood what Jesus meant—especially since John clarified Jesus's response.

Jesus said that if they, the Jews, would **destroy this temple**, He would raise it again in **three days**. They were bewildered by this statement. Why would they destroy the temple? In front of them were construction crews that were continuing the temple expansion work Herod the Great began in 19 BC. The Jews could see how much more impressive this temple was going to be compared to Zerubbabel's temple. At the time of this encounter, temple construction had been under way for **forty-six years**.

The Jews were bewildered because they took Jesus's words literally, as if He were speaking of the temple where they were standing. Jesus, though, was referring to **his body**, which would be **raised from the dead**. The Jews could not fathom either the destruction of the temple or its magical reconstruction in three days. Certainly, they were not considering His death and resurrection.

What was the significance of Jesus pointing to the temple as a metaphor for His resurrected body?

VERSES 21-23

After Jesus's resurrection, the disciples remembered what Jesus said in this encounter and **believed** both His words and ***the Scripture***.

John did not specify which Scripture; many scholars think he was referring to Psalm 69:9, mentioned in verse 17. Others suggest he was referring to Scriptures that teach the grave does not win (Ps. 16:8-11; Isa. 53:12). Later, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would bring to His disciples' remembrance Jesus's words and would enable them to understand (John 14:26; 16:14). This verse (2:22) is an example of that happening.

At Cana, Jesus had turned water into wine. He replaced the old with the new and better. Similarly, Jesus highlighted the inadequacies of ancient Jewish rituals. He replaced these with a faith system based on grace. His sacrifice on the cross as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) rendered the old sacrificial system obsolete.

Closing out this account, John tied it to the wedding in Cana. Seeing the "sign" of Jesus turning water into wine, His disciples believed in Him (v. 11). When He was in Jerusalem for the Passover, many who **saw the signs he was doing** likewise believed.

How does the resurrection serve as a sign of Jesus's glory and authority?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. (See John 20:16,27.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers should see Jesus working in even the small things.
- Believers must worship God in Spirit and truth.
- Believers should worship Jesus as the Son of God.

As a group, discuss ways of honoring Jesus to a greater degree within the group. What barriers need to be removed within the group so others can believe in Jesus as well?

Jesus's resurrection affirmed His authority. List ways you can recognize His identity and authority in your own life. How do the things you listed impact how you worship Jesus? With whom will you share what you are learning about the authority of Jesus?

PRAYER NEEDS



You Will Find

Jesus is the promised Messiah who came to save His people.

LUKE 2:1-15

The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is the oldest church in the world. Justin Martyr, an early church father, wrote in about AD 160 that Christians were visiting the site to honor where Jesus was born. In 325, Emperor Constantine ordered a church be built over the site. After the original structure was destroyed by fire, Emperor Justinian constructed a larger church, which is still in use today. Steps near the altar lead down to the spot Christians have visited for centuries.

What images come to mind when you envision the place where Jesus was born?

Photo: Grotto of the Nativity, fourteen-point silver star under the main altar marking the traditional spot of Jesus's birth.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 1-2

Luke began his account of Jesus's birth with the phrase, "In those days" (2:1). Those days began when Mary's father entered the contractual agreement with Joseph's father for Mary and Joseph to be married. The families had gone through the legally binding betrothal ceremony and, according to social customs of the day, the two were waiting several months to wed.

Seemingly unrelated at the time, Zechariah, a priest in the temple, was chosen by lot to burn incense in the sanctuary. While Zechariah was there, the angel Gabriel appeared and explained that his wife, Elizabeth, was going to have a son. Gabriel also appeared to Mary and explained that the Lord had chosen her to be mother of the Messiah. This Son would be supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit.

One must imagine that sometime after Gabriel's visit Mary had an exciting yet difficult conversation, telling Joseph she was pregnant. Surely she explained the angel's visit, that she had not been with a man, and that the conception was a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Joseph found this explanation difficult to believe. He decided to divorce her as privately as possible.

An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and explained that Mary had told the truth. The child she was carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Further, the angel instructed Joseph to name the child "Jesus," the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name "Joshua," which translates as "Yahweh saves" (see Matt. 1:21).

Mary left Nazareth to visit Elizabeth. She stayed for three months. After Mary left, Elizabeth had a son, whom Zechariah named "John," according to Gabriel's instructions.

Joseph received notice he had to go to Bethlehem. The Roman government was requiring all men to return to their ancestral home in order to be counted for the census and taxed accordingly.

As you read through Luke 2:1-15, underline events and details that occurred just as they had been foretold. What do these specifics reveal about God's reliability?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE BIRTH (LUKE 2:1-7)

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. ² This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵ to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

VERSES 1-3

After decisively defeating Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC, Octavian (**Caesar**) became ruler over the Roman Empire. Four years later, the Roman Senate gave him the title **Augustus**, meaning “majestic” or “holy.” Roman mythology declared Caesar Augustus to be the son of a god (Zeus), a god himself, and the people’s savior. One ancient inscription states the “birth of the god Augustus was the beginning of good news for the world.” Thus, Luke’s mentioning *Caesar Augustus* in the birth sets up a stark contrast between the ruler of the massive Roman Empire and the Savior whose humble birth was the beginning of good news for the world.

A **registration**, essentially a census, occurred when **Quirinius** was governor of Syria, a position he held twice (6-4 BC and AD 6-9). Roman law did not require people to go to the town of their birth in order to be counted. Herod the Great, however, may have made this a requirement for the Jews.

VERSES 4-5

Although Joseph lived in **Nazareth**, he traveled to **Bethlehem** because he and/or his family had come from there. Luke called it **the city of David**, but then added the qualifier, **which is called Bethlehem**, to distinguish it from Jerusalem, which was commonly called the City

of David (2 Sam. 5:7; Neh. 3:15). The distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem was 70-100 miles, depending on the route. The two likely walked; the journey would have taken three days.

Jewish wedding celebrations lasted a week. The festivities began when the wedding party brought the bride to the groom's home the evening before the wedding. She and her friends stayed in a special room the groom had prepared. The next day's celebrations included music, games, and a lavish evening meal. At the end of the meal, the couple would retire to a private room and consummate their union. Mary and Joseph were not yet intimate (see Matt. 1:25)—hence they were **engaged** rather than married.

How do the details point to God's plan for salvation being established since the creation?

VERSES 6-7

Luke's Gospel offers scant details about the Messiah's birth. What do we know for sure? First, the birth occurred while Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem. How long they had been there before the birth is unclear. Second, this was Mary's **firstborn son**. The New Testament later referred to brothers and sisters of Jesus (Luke 8:19-21; Mark 6:3; Acts 1:14). Third, Mary **wrapped** her newborn Son **in cloth**. This type of wrapping dates back centuries (Ezek. 16:4) and is practiced today by some Middle Eastern people groups. Mary placed her Son in a **manger**.

Many first-century houses had a room for guests called a *kataluma* in Greek. The upper room where Jesus and the disciples shared their final Passover was a *kataluma*. In the story of the nativity, *kataluma* is translated as **guest room** or "inn" in some translations. Evidently, the *kataluma* in the home where Joseph and Mary had planned to stay was full by the time the couple arrived.

At the other end of the house would have been a room a couple of steps lower than the main level. This room had a door that opened to the outside through which animals were brought in for the night. The room would have had a stone trough or **manger** for feeding the

animals. Although most nativity sets portray a different scene, it does fit well with Luke's description of where Jesus was born.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. (See Luke 1:35; John 1:14.)

THE ANNOUNCEMENT (LUKE 2:8-12)

⁸ In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

VERSES 8-9

News of the Messiah's birth was proclaimed to the least likely—**shepherds**. Although shepherding had been an honorable occupation in the days of Abraham and David, by the New Testament time people considered shepherds untrustworthy. Shepherds spent long periods of time tending to other people's sheep. The nomadic nature of the job erased almost all accountability. Thus, a shepherd could have lamb chops for supper and tell the owner of the flock the next week that a wolf had devoured the animal. So firmly established was this reputation that shepherds could not be witnesses in legal proceedings.

The shepherds mentioned in the birth narrative were **keeping watch** over their flock. The Greek literally reads that the shepherds were keeping watches, meaning they were sleeping in shifts, with each one taking his turn to guard the sheep from predators.

These shepherds were watching their flock **in the same region**, near Bethlehem. The location is significant. People within a certain distance from Jerusalem raised livestock with the understanding their animals were to be sacrificed at the temple. The outer distance of

that perimeter was a location known as Migdal Eder, which translates from Hebrew as “Tower of the Flock.” Migdal Eder is located just outside of Bethlehem (see Gen. 35:16-21). Thus, the shepherds were tending sheep that were likely to be offered as sacrifices. The scene foreshadowed the sacrificial death of “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Luke earlier used the phrase **angel of the Lord** to describe Gabriel, who had appeared to Zechariah (1:11). This angel who appeared to the shepherds, though, did not give his name. Absence of a name places the focus on the message rather than the messenger. When Zechariah saw Gabriel, he was terrified; when the angel stood before the shepherds, they too **were terrified**.

When the angel appeared, God’s glory **shone around them**. Paul later used the same term to describe his conversion: “King Agrippa, while on the road at midday, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me” (Acts 26:13). In the Old Testament, God’s **glory** was the manifestation of His presence (Ex. 16:10; 24:17; Ps. 63:2).

BIBLE SKILL: *Read a Bible dictionary article to gain insight*

Read an article about angels in a Bible dictionary. Note the different nature and functions identified. Review Bible passages included in the article, especially passages that point to the Angel of the Lord. What relationship do angels have to Christ? What powers and limits exist for angels? How does the appearance of angels in Luke illustrate the purpose, powers, and limits?

VERSES 10-12

Echoing what Gabriel had said to Zechariah (Luke 1:13), the angel said to the shepherds, **Don’t be afraid**. This was a common word of assurance offered by a heavenly visitor. (See Luke 1:30; Gen. 15:1; Judg. 6:22-23; Dan. 10:12,19.)

The angel's purpose was to bring ***good news***. The good news was ***for all the people***. Luke had earlier spoken of the *people* to refer to the Jews (1:17,68,77). Later in his writing, though, Luke used the word to include the Gentiles (Acts 15:12-14; 18:5-10). The good news is that Jesus came for all; none are excluded.

The angel began his good news by emphasizing the when: ***today***. In Luke's Gospel, this word almost always signaled a message of salvation and deliverance. For instance, Jesus began His sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth by saying, "Today, . . . this Scripture has been fulfilled" (4:21). Jesus told Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:9). When Jesus hung on the cross, His final promise was, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43).

The angel used three titles for Jesus: ***Savior***, ***Messiah***, and ***Lord***. This is the only time in his Gospel that Luke referred to Jesus as *Savior*. The Old Testament referred to God as the Savior (Isa. 43:11; Jer. 3:23). Mary reflected this Jewish understanding; she responded to Gabriel's message with, "my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). The angel told Joseph to name the child "Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Messiah, from the Greek word *Christos*, means "anointed." The Jews, who in the first century were under Roman rule, were expecting an anointed king from the line of David who would rescue them from their oppressors. Although *Christos*, which was Anglicized as "Christ," was a title, by the time Luke wrote his Gospel it had essentially become an accepted part of the Nazarene's name—Jesus Christ.

Lord referred to the supreme authority, master, or ruler. Romans called their emperor "lord." Jews referred to God as Lord. Seeing the resurrected Jesus, Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God," (John 20:28). It was not the resurrection, though, that earned Him this status; He was, as "Silent Night" says, "Jesus Lord at Thy birth."

The sign was not that the baby was wrapped in cloth. Any infant would have been this way. The sign was that the newborn was in a manger, a feed-trough. That would be unexpected.

What is the significance of the titles used by the angel when referencing Jesus?

THE SONG (LUKE 2:13-15)

¹³ Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors! ¹⁵ When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

VERSES 13-15

The word **host** referred to a military unit. This was likely the same type of unit that had protected Elisha when the Arameans opposed him. After Elisha’s frightened servant explained how massive the Aramean army was, “Then Elisha prayed, ‘LORD, please open his eyes and let him see.’ So, the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17). John, while on Patmos, saw a vast multitude in heaven that lifted their voices in praise to God (Rev. 19:1-8).

The angelic pronouncement came because God’s salvation had now been revealed. This called for His **glory** to be proclaimed **in the highest heaven** and **peace on earth to people he favors**. The word *favors* refers to God’s saving pleasure. The **peace** of God comes to those who have been saved (Rom. 5:1). One of the Old Testament titles for the anticipated Messiah was the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

Just as unexpectedly as they had arrived, the angels left. Although the angel had said the baby had been born in the city of David, the shepherds knew where to go—to Bethlehem. And although the angel had delivered the message, the shepherds knew the source of that message—the Lord had made it known to them.

One must wonder, as the shepherds made their way to Bethlehem, did they talk excitedly or were they silent and in awe because of what they had seen and heard? How would you have been?

How does Jesus bring peace in our world?

APPLY THE TEXT

- The location of Jesus's birth fulfilled prophecy about the Messiah.
- Jesus is the Savior to all who believe in Him.
- Peace comes through faith in Jesus.

How does the truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah impact how your Bible study group functions and its purpose? What actions does the group need to strengthen to demonstrate this truth more fully within the group?

Jesus came as the Messiah, Savior, and Lord. Who do you know that needs to have a personal relationship with Jesus? How can you use the passage examined today to share with them?

PRAYER NEEDS



Everyone Who Believes

Jesus offers eternal life to all who believe in Him.

JOHN 3:4-18

A new year represents a fresh start. This is the day we start that new diet; the day we begin to finish that project; the day we take that first step toward completing a 5k run without walking. This is a new year with no history or regrets. Jesus told Nicodemus that his life could be characterized by newness if he would believe in Him.

What do you most look forward to with the start of a new year?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 3:1-36

John 3 is one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament, primarily because it contains the gospel in a sentence (John 3:16). Similarly, most believers know something about Nicodemus and his nighttime discussion with Jesus. Unfortunately, familiarity sometimes causes readers to overlook details of this encounter, limiting their comprehension of important truths.

Coming to see Jesus, Nicodemus thought he was offering a compliment by acknowledging that Jesus was acting under God's direction. Jesus needed no human affirmation. Instead, He focused the conversation on Nicodemus's need for a right relationship with God.

Jesus had a way of turning statements back on the speaker. Using the phrase "born again," he roused the Pharisee's inquisitiveness and simply but profoundly addressed several vital truths. First, human beings must experience a spiritual rebirth to have a right relationship with God. Second, faith in God's Son is the only way people can undergo such transformation. Third, without being born again, each person remains condemned. Fourth, Jesus did not come to condemn; people were already condemned because of unbelief. Finally, Jesus came so everyone who believes in Him might be saved.

The scene suddenly changes in the second half of this chapter, but the theme remains the same. Jesus and His disciples moved into the Judean countryside near the place where John the Baptist was baptizing. John's disciples were concerned that more people were following Jesus than John. Rather than being threatened by this news, John explained that his preaching prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah. John admonished his followers for concentrating on the earthly rather than the heavenly. Jesus was the One who came from above. He alone can give eternal life.

Read John 3:4-18, identifying the order of the points being made by Jesus. How does each point made lead to the conclusion that all who fail to believe in Jesus have already been judged?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

BORN AGAIN? (JOHN 3:4-8)

⁴ “How can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?”
⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. ⁸ The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

VERSES 4-8

Nicodemus was a good man and a religious man—one with a firm understanding of the Old Testament. A man could not become a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin if he were otherwise (v. 1). Referring to Jesus as “Rabbi” showed that he was respectful. By saying he was aware of the signs (or miracles) Jesus had done, Nicodemus indicated he knew at least something about Jesus (v. 2).

For Nicodemus to come to Jesus about religious matters would have been completely unheard of in first-century Jewish culture. Why would a Pharisee come to a carpenter who was an itinerant preacher? This would be like a banker asking a kid who ran a lemonade stand for financial advice. This meeting was evidence that in spite of all of Nicodemus’s achievements and honors, something was still missing—something deep inside.

Although Nicodemus had not asked a question, “Jesus replied” (v. 3). Jesus responded to Nicodemus’s heart and mind rather than his words. He understood Nicodemus’s concern and need.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Kingdom*

The Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. (See Luke 18:15-17; Colossians 1:13.)

Jesus explained that to ***enter the kingdom of God*** a person had to be “born again” (v. 3). This would have been shocking news for Nicodemus. His questions in verse 4 reveal he did not understand what Jesus was saying; he was applying what Jesus said to a physical birth rather than a spiritual one.

BIBLE SKILL: *Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.*

Compare John 3 with 1 Peter 1:23 and 1 John 5:1. How does being born spiritually convey the idea of spiritual transformation? Compare this passage. How is being born of God linked to faith in Christ and love for God? How does the picture of the new birth help you grasp the relationship believers share with the Heavenly Father

Having heard Nicodemus’s questions, Jesus explained further. In doing so, He used the phrase ***born of water and the Spirit*** as a parallel to being born again or from above. In mentioning *water*, Jesus was pointing back to the Old Testament, which linked water and the Spirit to being spiritually cleansed and having a new heart and new spirit placed in an obedient follower of God (Ezek. 36:25-27).

Jesus next contrasted the two births, the physical (***born of the flesh***) and the spiritual (***born of the Spirit***). When John’s Gospel speaks about *flesh*, it refers to that which is mortal, frail, and created from dust. Paul used the same terminology to describe human sinful nature (Rom. 7:4-20). When John wrote about being born of the *Spirit*, he was referring to the eternal, powerful, and transformative presence of God in a person. This state cannot come about by human effort or achievement; it only comes from above.

In verse 7, Jesus reiterated His earlier statement, but in doing so used a plural pronoun, ***you must be born again***. Thus, this requirement for a new birth applied not only to Nicodemus but to all the Pharisees and Sanhedrin, all the Jews, and all humanity.

Jesus then compared this new birth to wind. The Greek word Jesus used can be interpreted as both Spirit and wind; thus Jesus was making a play on words. He was employing a common experience to describe how the **Spirit** works. The phrase **so it is** connected a natural phenomenon with **everyone born of the Spirit**. One might not be able to determine where, when, or how the Holy Spirit accomplishes His work, but evidence of the result abounds.

No one can enter God's kingdom by human effort or natural means. God's Spirit moves within the human spirit to convince us that we are sinners. He illuminates Scriptures and magnifies Jesus as God's Son who died and rose again. As we respond in repentance and faith, God accomplishes that mysterious act of salvation and we can be born again.

What do people find confusing about salvation coming through faith in Jesus alone?

HOW? (JOHN 3:9-13)

⁹ “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus. ¹⁰ “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied.

¹¹ “Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven — the Son of Man.

VERSES 9-13

Nicodemus’s first question was, “How can anyone be born when he is old?” (v. 4). Indicating he still did not understand what Jesus was saying, he next asked, **How can these things be?**

Certainly for years Nicodemus had taught principles related to being part of the kingdom—this included obeying the Law, keeping the commandments, observing the feasts and traditions, praying often and properly, demonstrating piety, and attending worship at

the temple. Those actions would help an observant Jew to be ready for the kingdom and the judgment to come. Nicodemus believed one's righteous works and achievements made a person right with God. Jesus, though, was teaching something radically different. What was necessary was for a person to be born from above.

How might Nicodemus's religious heritage and training have hindered him from understanding what Jesus meant?

Jesus believed Nicodemus should have understood what He was saying. The Old Testament had several verses that linked God's Spirit and water with new life (Isa. 32:15-20; 44:3-4; Ezek. 39:29). Interestingly, beginning with verse 11, we do not hear further from Nicodemus. Thus, John's emphasis was not on the Pharisee or his questions but on Jesus's words and **testimony**.

In verse 13, Jesus explained why His words were uniquely reliable. No other human had ever been to the heavenly realm, known heavenly things from personal experience, and come from the heavenly realm—except **the Son of Man** Himself. The verb tense John used in stating Jesus **descended from heaven** indicates a unique event in history. This points back to Jesus, the Word, existing from eternity past, becoming flesh, and dwelling in our midst (1:1-14). This uniqueness set Jesus apart, affirmed the fact He was (and is) the Messiah, and serves as the basis for our being able to trust in Him.

How do a person's questions about Jesus reveal what they trust for truth?

BELIEVE (JOHN 3:14-18)

¹⁴ “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.¹⁶ For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷ For God did not send his

Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

VERSES 14-15

Having spoken about the Son of Man descending from heaven, Jesus next spoke about Him being ***lifted up***. In doing so, He was referencing a story from Numbers 21. Snakes had bitten the Israelites while they were in the desert. After Moses interceded on their behalf, God instructed him to make a likeness of a snake and lift it up on a pole. When the Israelites looked at the snake, they recovered (Num. 21:4-9).

Jesus was foretelling His death, when He would be lifted up on a cross and become the source of life for all who had been infected by the serpent's life-destroying deceit. Jesus used *lifted up* terminology later in His ministry as well (John 8:28; 12:32,34).

Jesus explained how the life He offered was different from what the Israelites experienced in the desert—the life He offered was eternal. And rather than looking at the image lifted up, the requirement for eternal life was that each individual ***believes in him***. Jesus's death on the cross provided atonement for sinful humanity. Persons who look to Him with faith as the crucified and risen Lord will ***have eternal life***.

Why is it so important for people to understand that salvation is available to everyone who believes in Jesus?

VERSE 16

Nicodemus must have been surprised when Jesus explained that God was making this offer to ***the world***. Jews could not fathom God loving beyond His own people. Indeed, Christianity is unique in teaching that God's love is not limited by race or nationality.

For God to give ***his one and only Son*** referred both to the Messiah coming to earth in human form and to His atoning sacrifice on Calvary. This one statement emphasizes the Father's sacrificial self-

giving love. Salvation comes at His initiation and His expense. This gift is offered to ***everyone who believes in him*** (see 1:14; 1 John 2:2).

Faith provides the “how” of salvation. God does the work of regeneration, but He chooses to do so upon one’s faith. To believe is to have a personal, trustful response to God’s gift of forgiveness, grace, and eternal life. To ***perish*** is the opposite of having ***eternal life***. Eternal life is made possible to all who believe in Jesus because, as the prologue of John’s Gospel stated, “in him was life” (John 1:4).

What makes God’s gift of salvation so appealing? What would get in the way of a person accepting this gift?

VERSES 17-18

God’s intention and desire is to ***save the world***, not to condemn it. That desire was behind the virgin birth, Jesus’s sinless life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection, so that a rebellious and disobedient world might believe in God’s one and only Son. God’s dramatic actions affirm what the Old Testament taught—God’s preference is to save, not to condemn (Ezek. 18:23).

Scripture divides the world into two groups: those who believe and those who do not.

Scripture divides the world into two groups: those who believe and those who do not (v. 18). Those who do not believe are condemned; those who believe are not condemned. The reason for the condemnation is because the non-believer has not put his or her faith in Jesus. A person who fails to believe is ***already condemned*** because all born to Adam’s race inherit a sinful nature.

This too would have been news to Nicodemus. First-century Jews believed that when the Messiah came, he would judge Gentiles but not Jews. Jesus stated that those who avoid God’s judgment will be those who believe in His one and only Son. The glorious news of the gospel is that grace, faith, and eternal life are still offered to all who believe.

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must help others understand the truth about salvation.
- Believers can have confidence in knowing that Jesus is the Messiah.
- God lovingly offers salvation to all who will accept Jesus.

Discuss as a group the ramifications of salvation being offered to all who believe in Jesus. How does this truth impact how the group functions? What needs to change for the group to demonstrate this truth to a greater degree?

Who do you know, friend or family member, who is not a believer? How can you use what Jesus shared with Nicodemus to initiate a conversation with them about Jesus?

PRAYER NEEDS



But Whoever Drinks

Jesus provides eternal satisfaction for all who trust in Him.

JOHN 4:11-26

We are thirsty. Advertisers play to that thirst, promising us their product will give us what we are missing. Social media feeds our thirst as well, knowing what will cause us to keep scrolling through the endless feeds. People throughout history have had that same thirst, looking for something that will quench it—anything. Jesus encountered a woman thirsting as well and helped her find the water for which she longed.

What physical realities do people look to for satisfaction?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 4:1-54

In 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered Israel and destroyed its capital city, Samaria. They took many Israelites as captives and moved captives from other lands into the almost-desolate Israel. These newly-relocated peoples brought their religious traditions with them. In time, some of the remnant Jews married the new inhabitants and mingled their religious beliefs with Judaism. These were the Samaritans.

Not wanting to be used by the Pharisees in a false competition with John the Baptist, Jesus departed Judea to return to Galilee. He had a divine appointment with a woman who did not expect her life to change that day. Because of her, Jesus deliberately traveled through the Samaritan town of Sychar. Sychar is identified with Shechem, the original capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Although weary from His journey, Jesus was not too tired to fulfill His Messianic purpose to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). At noon, He sat on the edge of the well while His disciples went into the city to buy food. Into this setting came a Samaritan woman. When Jesus spoke to her, He broke several customs that surprised her. Men did not speak to unaccompanied women. Jews did not speak with Samaritans. Jewish strangers did not ask for help from a Samaritan woman. As we later discover, she was a woman of ill-repute, making the encounter increasingly odd. Yet, tradition would not prevent Jesus from reaching out to save her.

Jesus's encounter with the woman, her response, and the subsequent witness to the people of the city provide the primary focus for this week's lesson. We will learn how people can be led to see Jesus as the Christ and follow Him. The goal of Jesus's mission involves making one's way past cultural barriers to see lives transformed through the gospel of Jesus.

As you read through John 4:11-26, look for ways Jesus showed compassion to the woman. How does this encounter with the Samaritan woman help us understand the depth of Jesus's love for all people?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THIRST QUENCHED? (JOHN 4:11-15)

¹¹ “Sir,” said the woman, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this ‘living water’? ¹² You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.” ¹³ Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. ¹⁴ But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.” ¹⁵ “Sir,” the woman said to him, “give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”

VERSES 11-15

The Pharisees heard that Jesus’s disciples were baptizing more followers than John the Baptist and his disciples. When Jesus learned the Pharisees knew about this, He rightly concluded that the Pharisees would come after Him. So He headed north, traveling from Judea to Galilee. Samaria was located between the two territories. Jews typically would avoid Samaria by traveling through Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Jesus did not.

The unnamed Samaritan woman went to the well to draw water in the middle of the day. Women typically drew water early in the mornings when it was cooler. Her going in the middle of the day highlighted that she was likely a social outcast. Jesus spoke to her, “Give me a drink” (v. 7). She was shocked by His request (v. 9).

Jews would have considered the Samaritan woman’s water bucket to be defiled and unclean. Jesus’s actions were shocking. But in His eyes, people were more important than protocol.

Jesus offered “living water” (v. 10), a term that typically referred to flowing water. Shechem had no rivers or streams; all local water came from wells. Thus, for Jesus to offer living water confused the woman. Thinking in physical terms, she noted Jesus did not even **have a bucket**, and there was no **living water** in the area.

The woman questioned Jesus’s ability. Could He provide water without having to dig a well as their **father Jacob** had done?

The implied answer was “No!” Jesus explained the water He provided was superior—it would permanently quench one’s thirst.

For those who received His “gift of God” (v. 10), Jesus explained this water would be ***springing up in him for eternal life***. Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit, who alone can give life (6:63). Additionally, He was speaking of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that God’s people would “joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation” (Isa. 12:3).

Three times this passage speaks of being thirsty, emphasizing that Jesus was responding to a genuine physical need. What He was offering, though, was more. He offered to satisfy the woman’s thirst at a spiritual level.

How does our spiritual need resemble an unquenchable thirst?

BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

Examine Jeremiah 2:13 and 17:13, Zechariah 14:8, John 7:37-39, and Revelation 7:17. How do these passages’ use of the term “living water” give insight into what Jesus told the Samaritan woman? Write a one-sentence summary defining the term based on these passages.

SIN EXPOSED (JOHN 4:16-20)

¹⁶ “Go call your husband,” he told her, “and come back here.”

¹⁷ “I don’t have a husband,” she answered. “You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’ ” Jesus said. ¹⁸ “For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What

you have said is true.”¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

VERSES 16-18

Jesus seemingly changed the subject by directing the woman to summon her **husband**. Jesus, though, was not changing the subject. He was drawing attention to the woman’s personal need and longing, a thirst she had been unable to satisfy.

This directive likely gave the woman a jolt. She explained she had no husband. Anyone else hearing this might have thought she was a widow or, less likely, that she had never been married. But Jesus knew the woman’s marital history and her current situation. Earlier in these verses, He revealed His humanity; He was thirsty. By showing He supernaturally knew of the woman’s marital history and status, Jesus revealed His divinity.

First-century rabbis taught that the maximum times a woman could be married was two, or under unusual circumstances, three. After five tries, this woman was now living with a man who was not her husband.

Notice that Jesus did not condemn the woman. John had earlier explained that Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn it (3:17). To “save the world” meant to rescue individuals from the power, presence, and penalty of sin in their lives. Although Jesus did not condemn the woman, He did not approve of her lifestyle. This woman was, to say the least, morally compromised. He thus confronted her with the truth about her sinful life.

The amazing thing is that Jesus knew all about her life without her having to say anything. It’s a reminder that Jesus knows what’s going on in our lives. Nothing is hidden from Him. He confronted the woman with her sin; He does the same with us today. He reminds us that we are all sinners in need of cleansing and forgiveness. And as John the Baptist proclaimed, Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (1:29).

VERSES 19-20

By acknowledging Jesus was **a prophet**, the woman conceded that He was correct about her life and lifestyle. This evidently made

her uncomfortable, so she directed the conversation in a different direction, the proper place for worship.

She may have even gestured toward Mount Gerizim, which overlooked Jacob's well. Samaritans believed the floodwaters in Noah's day did not cover Mount Gerizim. They had chosen **this mountain** as the proper place of worship because it was near Shechem, where Abraham had first built an altar to God (Gen. 12:6-7). Samaritans believed Abraham had taken Isaac to Mount Gerizim to offer him as a sacrifice; Jews identify the site as Mount Moriah, which later became the location of the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the proper location for the worship of God had been a point of bitter contention between the Jews and Samaritans.

Admitting our sin is the first step toward salvation. Confession and repentance of sin goes hand in hand with faith along the path of salvation. (See Acts 3:19; Rom. 10:9-10; 1 John 1:9.)

What makes admitting our past failures and current sin so difficult?

TRUE WORSHIP (JOHN 4:21-24)

²¹ Jesus told her, “Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

VERSES 21-24

Everything Jesus had to say about the proper way to worship is in these verses. Yet not once does He mention music style, the use of instruments, hymnals, or how to take up the offering or administer the Lord's Supper.

Refusing to be drawn into the argument, Jesus stated that **an hour is coming** when neither Jews nor Samaritans would worship

the Father in their traditional sites; their ongoing worship war would soon be irrelevant. In AD 70, the prophetic word that Jesus spoke came true. The Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple and killed thousands of Samaritans on Mount Gerizim.

Because the Samaritans rejected the writings of the prophets, the historical books, and the books of wisdom and poetry in the Old Testament, Jesus stated they worshiped what they did not know. They lacked the full revelation of the Old Testament. He went on to explain that the Jews were correct in their worship and understanding by saying that ***salvation is from the Jews***. By this He meant God had chosen to reveal Himself to the Jews throughout the Old Testament and that salvation would be offered to all humanity through the Jewish Messiah, referring to Himself.

Because the Messiah had come, Jesus could say that the hour ***is now here***. The true worship of God would not be based on a location, rituals, or rites—but on the heart of the worshiper.

Genuine and acceptable worship would be ***in Spirit and in truth***. This worship would flow from the *Spirit* of God, who is unseen and yet vibrant and life producing. *Truth* meant it would align with the teaching of Scripture. Spirit and truth are not separate entities; they both ***must*** be at the core of our worship. In genuine Christian worship, both are essential.

How can prejudices and debates get in the way of true worship of God?

How do we know when we have worshiped God in Spirit and in truth?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

God the Son now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord. (See Colossians 1:27; 1 John 4:14-15.)

TRUE FAITH (JOHN 4:25-26)

²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Jesus told her, “I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

VERSES 25-26

The woman said she was certain ***the Messiah is coming*** and that ***he will explain everything***. The pronoun *he* in the woman’s statement is in the emphatic position in the Greek. The meaning is that *he* is not *you*. Thus in the woman’s mind, both she and Jesus still had to wait for this Messiah to appear.

Jesus then declared, ***I . . . am he.*** Two remarkable truths are in simple declaration. First, apart from His trial, this is the only time in Scripture Jesus plainly identified Himself as the Messiah (Mark 14:60-62). Even when John the Baptist’s disciples came asking if Jesus was the Messiah or should they look for another, Jesus did not say, “I am He.” Instead, He instructed John’s disciples to go back and report what they had heard Jesus preach and had seen Him do, including the miracles (Matt. 11:2-6).

Second, in using the phrase “I am,” Jesus was using the name God revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai (Ex. 3:14). In doing so, Jesus was identifying Himself as God in the flesh. Jesus was declaring that this Jewish (not Samaritan) man before her was the long-awaited Messiah and the source of the promised living water. He was the very one she had been looking for. The woman need look no further. Her anticipation was realized in the presence of the person before her. All her longing, every painful need, each point of confusion—everything could be satisfied in Jesus.

Believers find eternal satisfaction through faith in the promised Messiah. Like this woman, we come to Jesus bearing burdens of sin. Our guilt weighs heavily on us, but He lifts it and frees us to enjoy eternal life in Him.

**What role does faith play in a person’s understanding of spiritual truth?
How much knowledge does someone need to believe in Jesus and be saved?**

APPLY THE TEXT

- People find lasting spiritual satisfaction only in Jesus.
- Admitting our sin is the first step toward salvation.
- Believers must worship God in Spirit and truth.
- Believers find eternal satisfaction through faith in the promised Messiah.

As a group, discuss what worshiping in Spirit and in truth looks like today. How does your group help facilitate this type of worship? What actions can the group take to better encourage worship in Spirit and in truth?

Examine your life for areas in which you are looking for satisfaction apart from Jesus. How would you say these stack up against the living water satisfaction that Jesus alone can provide? What can you do this week to help move away from these actions, attitudes, or thoughts and put your focus instead on Jesus?

PRAYER NEEDS



Pick Up Your Mat

Jesus is Lord over all creation and values all people.

JOHN 5:5-16

Pity usually involves our response to a situation. We define a person by what he or she is experiencing. Compassion usually involves our response to a person. We define the experience by how the person is impacted. Compassion tends to move us toward acting because our focus is on the person and not the situation. We see Jesus showing both pity and compassion as he interacted with an unnamed lame man.

What is the difference between pity and compassion? Can a person express both simultaneously? Explain.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 5:1-47

Jerusalem's only natural source of water is the Gihon Spring, which flows east of the City of David. Water from the spring collects in underground caves. Beyond these, people once dug massive cisterns into the bedrock to collect rainwater. They lined these cisterns with a gray mortar that contained ash, soot, and other organic matter. After returning from Babylonian captivity, the people began to build large open-air pools that served as water reservoirs for the city's growing population. One of these was the Pool of Bethesda, which was located north of the temple mount.

On His way into Jerusalem for an unspecified festival, Jesus found a large number of people gathered around the Pool of Bethesda. Located just inside the northeastern wall of the city, the pool offered respite for travelers coming through the Sheep Gate. The gate's name possibly resulted from its being the place where sheep were brought for sacrifice or for the marketplace.

In addition to travelers from the northern territories who stopped to wash and rest, many chronically ill and injured people gathered around the pool. Jews and non-Jews alike believed the waters had healing powers. Non-Jews saw it as a healing sanctuary and attributed its powers to Eshmun, the Semitic god of healing. They believed that an angel stirred the water on occasion and the first person to enter the pool would be healed.

After healing a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years, Jesus told him to take his mat and go home. Instead of showing gratitude to Jesus for his healing, the man deliberately sought the inquiring Jews to report Jesus's identity, setting up a confrontation between the Jewish leaders and Jesus. Jesus used the conflict as an opportunity to declare Himself to be God's Son.

As you read John 5:5-16, chart the actions of each person or group of people involved. What do the actions and reactions of each person or group reveal about their view of Jesus and of people?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

COMPASSION EXPRESSED (JOHN 5:5-9a)

⁵ One man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and realized he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to get well?” ⁷ “Sir,” the disabled man answered, “I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I’m coming, someone goes down ahead of me.” ⁸ “Get up,” Jesus told him, “pick up your mat and walk.” ^{9a} Instantly the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk.

VERSES 5-7

Jesus gave His attention to those who were hurting and helpless—those disenfranchised and discarded by proper society. He focused on those whom others ignored. That was the case when He passed by the Pool of Bethesda. Proper rabbis and religious leaders would have avoided such a place out of concern that contact with the sick and suffering might make them ritually impure. Such contact would make them unfit for temple service.

At the pool, Jesus saw a man who ***had been disabled for thirty-eight years.*** Reading this detail, John’s Jewish audience likely recalled that the Israelites wandered thirty-eight years as they traveled from Kadesh-barnea to the Zared Valley (Deut. 2:14). Whether in the wilderness or beside a pool of water, the almost four decades had to seem like an eternity, especially when one is longing for relief.

John did not describe the man’s disability. Evidently, though, it caused some type of paralysis or weakness that rendered the man unable to maneuver himself. When Jesus saw him, He knew that the disabled man had ***already been*** by the pool ***a long time.***

Whereas Jesus performed the earlier two signs in John’s Gospel at the request of someone else (John 2:3; 4:47), Jesus Himself initiated the healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda. He began the conversation with the man by asking if he wanted to be healed. This question is a reminder that some people become comfortable in their misery. Others who suffer can be overcome with a sense of hopelessness; this was likely the case for the disabled man.

The man's response indicated he did not know who Jesus was. Rather than focus on Jesus's ability, the man fixated on his own disability. He explained why he had not been able to make it into the waters and be healed. He had **no one** to put him into the waters when they stirred. Standing before him, though, was the One who could both help and heal him. Yet the man did not know who Jesus was (see v. 13).

Rather than focus on Jesus's ability, the man fixated on his own disability.

Believers should not ignore persons in need simply because they have suffered for a long time. Too often, we dismiss such sufferers with the idea that they could improve themselves if only they would. Like the man in this story, many people—including the unborn—have no one to help them. God puts us in their paths by divine appointment so we can be His channel of blessing.

How was interacting with the nameless man an act of mercy? Why does Jesus expect His followers to be instruments of His mercy?

VERSES 8-9a

The power of Jesus to heal and to change a life is not limited by external or physical circumstances. He spoke simply with three commands: ***Get up, . . . pick up your mat and walk.***

This time the man offered no excuses. He did not further bemoan his physical condition. Instead, he responded with obedience, following Jesus's commands. He was able to obey ***instantly*** because Jesus had made the man well. Taking his mat with him underscored the permanence of the man's healing; he would not be returning to the Pool of Bethesda tomorrow.

How does a person's obedience to Jesus serve as a statement of faith as well?

DID YOU KNOW?

The Mishnah, a collection of Jewish rabbinic discussions compiled about AD 220, has six major divisions. Two of the divisions (Shabbath and Erubin) are devoted to rules and regulations regarding the Sabbath and define “work” under thirty-nine headings in an attempt to show what was allowed or prohibited on the Sabbath. (See article on p. 127.)

LEGALISM EXPOSED (JOHN 5:9b-13)

^{9b} Now that day was the Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “This is the Sabbath. The law prohibits you from picking up your mat.” ¹¹ He replied, “The man who made me well told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ” ¹² “Who is this man who told you, ‘Pick up your mat and walk’ ?” they asked. ¹³ But the man who was healed did not know who it was, because Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

VERSES 9b-10

John’s next sentence sounds an ominous note—the healing occurred on **the Sabbath**. In picking up and carrying his mat, the man at the Pool of Bethesda had committed a violation that was listed in *The Mishnah*’s “carrying goods” category. Jews likely based this in part on Jeremiah 17:21-22, which prohibits carrying a load through the city gates or out of one’s house on the Sabbath.

Rather than show compassion, the Jewish authorities focused only on how the man violated their religious beliefs and practices. Their behavior is a reminder that we can easily get our eyes off people and miss opportunities to show care and concern to the wounded and hurting who are right in front of us.

How can religion become an excuse not to show compassion to hurting people?

VERSES 11-13

Upon hearing the Jews' criticism, the man explained that the reason he was carrying his mat was because the one who healed him had said, **Pick up your mat and walk.** Wanting to make sure he did not come into the crosshairs of the religious authorities, the man blamed Jesus for his healing.

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary to gain deeper insight.*

Read an article about the Sabbath in a Bible dictionary. Note Bible passages cited in the article, reading selected passages. How do the Old Testament and New Testament teachings on the Sabbath complement each other? How did Jesus's actions in John 5 demonstrate respect for the Sabbath and the rightness of acting on that day?

The Jews demanded to know, **Who is this man . . . ?** The question itself sounds like an accusation. Their concern was not about this seemingly random man who had violated the Sabbath. They wanted to know about the man who had the audacity to instigate this disobedience. They saw Him as the greater threat.

Still trying to claim his innocence, the healed man reported, albeit truthfully, that he **did not know** who Jesus was. Jesus had **slipped away** and disappeared **into the crowd.** Incredibly, the unnamed man had shown no interest in asking Jesus's name either before or after his healing. He was so concerned with the miracle that he forgot about the miracle worker.

Sometimes God chooses to heal supernaturally, without human intervention. At other times, God uses doctors, medicine, and other physical implements. Behind all healing is the Great Physician. In His divine providence, God determines who and how to heal, but in every instance, we recognize the Lord at work.

Why might Jesus act in a person's life even when they do not recognize Him?

IDENTITY EXPOSED (JOHN 5:14-16)

¹⁴ After this, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn’t happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went and reported to the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

VERSES 14-16

The next time we read of the man and Jesus, they were both *in the temple*. The verb tense Jesus used when He said to the man, *you are well*, indicated the man remained well. This was not a temporary fix to the man’s problem.

Jews generally believed that all suffering was related to sin. If a person had sinned, he would suffer; conversely, if a person was suffering, he must have sinned. They based this on Deuteronomy 29, in which the Lord promised blessings for those who obeyed His commands and curses on those who disobeyed.

This connection between suffering and sin was the dilemma faced by Job and his friends. Job adamantly and repeatedly claimed he had not sinned, and yet, he was suffering. The friends concluded Job was deceiving himself and trying to deceive others as well.

This supposed connection between sin and suffering later caused the disciples to ask Jesus about a blind man: “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). Before healing the blind man, Jesus explained that his condition “came about so God’s works might be displayed in him” (John 9:3).

Although Jesus recognized that sin could lead to suffering, He did not always connect the two. There was not always a cause-and-effect relationship. Yet, neither did Jesus always disconnect the two.

Jesus warned the man, telling him not to *sin anymore*, lest he suffer *something worse* than he had endured for the

thirty-eight years. The something **worse** likely did not refer to an even more debilitating physical malady. Instead, Jesus was referring to the man suffering eternal judgment.

How did the man respond to what Jesus had said and to the miracle He had performed? He sought out the Jews and explained that Jesus was responsible for his healing. In doing so, the healed man was attempting to ingratiate himself to the religious authorities. At the same time, the man's response does indicate something positive. The Jews had asked in verse 12, "Who is this man who told you, 'Pick up your mat and walk'?" The man reported that ***it was Jesus who had made him well.*** In doing so, he focused on the Man who was a Healer.

The response of the Jews was predictable, based on their earlier accusatory question, “Who is this man?” They **began persecuting Jesus**. The verb tense indicates that after this event, they were continually persecuting Him.

This event at the Pool of Bethesda and the subsequent run-in with the Jews marked a shift in how John reported the miracles or signs in his Gospel. The earlier signs were for the benefit of the recipient, this healing introduced a new thread that hereafter served as a theme in his Gospel. The miracles of Jesus became a point of contention for the religious leaders. Rather than rejoicing, the Jewish authorities responded with disapproval, opposition, and, ultimately, with seeking the death of Jesus.

Why is it sometimes easier to find fault instead of celebrating Jesus's working in a person's life?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and Social Order*

We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. (See Deuteronomy 10:18; James 1:27.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to offer compassion to all people.
- Believers can affirm Jesus working in the lives of all people.
- Believers can celebrate the works of Jesus.

With your Bible study group, identify people whom others might question if the group reached out to them. What actions can your class or group take to remove those barriers?

In your regular errands and outings, where are you likely to encounter people who are hurting or who have been marginalized? Recognizing those potential encounters, what can you do to prepare to minister to them and show them compassion?

PRAYER NEEDS



I Am the Bread

Jesus provides spiritual food that always satisfies.

JOHN 6:26-40

In Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist*, a starving Oliver brings his empty bowl to the master and pleads for more food. Instead of food, he receives a blow to the head and a prompt decision to sell him. That master viewed Oliver as a nuisance and not a person in need. Jesus not only compassionately fed thousands of hungry people, He reminded us that only faith in Him will satisfy our deepest needs.

What should a person expect from God?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 6:1-71

Jesus's response to a crowd of hungry people was due to His compassion for the people as well as His desire to challenge His disciples to deeper faith. When evening came, the disciples got in their boat and started across the Sea of Galilee toward Capernaum while Jesus remained in prayer. As a storm arose on the sea, Jesus walked onto the water to join them. If they were astonished at the multiplication of loaves and fish, they were overwhelmed by Jesus's sudden appearance. Receiving Him into the boat, the disciples found themselves at their destination.

The next morning, discovering Jesus had left, some of the people whom He had fed followed Him to Capernaum. Jesus recognized that they had not come for Him, but for what they could get from Him—free food. He urged them to seek the true bread that came from heaven.

Although Jesus had fed them through supernatural means, they demanded more signs as proof of His authority. Like many of us, they ignored what He had already done for them in an attempt to manipulate Him into doing what they wanted. When Jesus claimed to be the bread of life that could provide eternal life, they mocked Him. They could not understand the symbolism of His body being offered for them.

Jesus acknowledged that not everyone would believe. At that point, the crowd began to disperse. Even many disciples started to leave. Jesus questioned the Twelve about what they would do. Speaking for the group, Peter responded that they had no one else to whom they might go. Jesus alone had the words of eternal life. Yet, even among this small group, chosen by Jesus to be His inner circle, one remained an unbeliever and would be His betrayer.

As you read John 6:26-40, note evidence that affirms the divinity of Jesus. Why did this miracle stand out to the point that all four Gospel writers included it?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WANTS? (JOHN 6:26-29)

²⁶ Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Don’t work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set his seal of approval on him.” ²⁸ “What can we do to perform the works of God?” they asked. ²⁹ Jesus replied, “This is the work of God — that you believe in the one he has sent.”

VERSE 26

The miracles, or **signs** as John referred to them, gave evidence Jesus was divine—His turning water to wine (John 2:1-11), healing an official’s son (4:46-54), healing a paralyzed man (5:1-15), feeding the five thousand (6:1-15), and walking on the water (6:16-21).

John’s Gospel gives further evidence that Jesus was divine with examples of His knowing people’s true motives. He displayed this ability when He called His first disciples (1:24-51), when He spoke with Nicodemus (3:1-16), and later with the woman at the well (4:1-26). He again exhibited this ability when the crowds sailed across the Sea of Galilee and found Him in Capernaum. This crowd was part of the five thousand Jesus had fed the day before. When they found Him, they asked: “Rabbi, when did you get here?” (6:25).

Rather than answer their question, Jesus addressed their motives. He stated, ***you are looking for me . . . because you ate the loaves and were filled.*** Jesus knew their deeper need was spiritual—not physical. He was intent on taking the conversation to a deeper level. By beginning His statement with ***Truly I tell you,*** Jesus was indicating He was about to present vital information. He was about to reveal something about His identity.

How can a person’s wants be confused with needs? What are the dangers of failing to define the difference?

VERSES 27-29

Jesus instructed the crowd to work for ***the food that lasts for eternal life.*** Fresh in Jesus's mind was the scene of people eating until they were filled and the disciples afterward gathering up the leftovers of fish and loaves—food that would not endure (6:11-12).

Jesus's statement—***work for***—does not contradict what Paul later wrote, that salvation is “not from works” (Eph. 2:9). We know that for two reasons. First, Jesus said ***the Son of Man will give*** this food that lasts. There is nothing to be earned—it is given. Second, the *work* involved is to ***believe in the one God has sent.*** Jesus explained, ***This is the work of God***—to simply ***believe*** in the One He has sent. This is consistent with other teaching of Scripture, that salvation is made possible by believing in Jesus (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-10).

MANNA (JOHN 6:30-34)

³⁰ “What sign, then, are you going to do so that we may see and believe you?” they asked. “What are you going to perform? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” ³² Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, Moses didn’t give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ Then they said, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

VERSES 30-31

Jesus was aware people wanted a sign. After He had overturned the money changers' tables in the temple, the Jewish leaders challenged Him for a sign of His authority (John 2:18). Additionally, when Jesus received the request to heal the centurion's son, He stated that people would not believe unless they saw a sign (4:48).

Because Jews of the first century were anticipating the arrival of a prophet like Moses (6:14), they expected a sign that could be seen, and by seeing they could ***believe.*** According to their thinking, the sign would validate this was indeed the One they were expecting.

Moses had provided manna for forty years; Jesus had provided one meal. Since God had done that for their ***ancestors*** who were ***in the wilderness,*** maybe Jesus would be able to offer an ongoing supply of food for them in a similar manner. The children of Israel had eaten

bread from heaven; Jesus gave them loaves that were just like what they would have eaten at home. Jewish writings from this era indicate the people expected the Messiah to provide them manna. Thus, those who had traveled across the lake to find Jesus brazenly challenged Him and demanded to know if this was the work He was **going to perform**. They were interested in having their stomachs filled; Jesus was interested in filling their hearts.

Why do people insist on a sign to validate their faith?

They were interested in having their stomachs filled; Jesus was interested in filling their hearts.

VERSES 32-33

Jesus again used the phrase **Truly I tell you** to indicate He was about to present vital information. This information would both clarify misunderstandings they had about the manna their ancestors had eaten and provide information about what Jesus was offering them. Jesus explained the following points:

(1) **Moses didn't give** the bread that had come from heaven; the **Father** was the source (see Ex. 16:4; Ps. 78:24-25).

(2) The manna of the past was not **the true bread** from heaven the Father gives. The contrast is between a past event and a current *true* gift the Father continually gives. The verb tense indicates an ongoing gift. As such, it is not something that was available only to those who physically followed Jesus or only those who made up the early church. The Father gives this true bread from heaven still today.

(3) Whereas the manna sustained physical life, this true bread is for spiritual **life**. This **bread of God** is the source of eternal life. Being the *bread of God*, it originates and comes from the Father.

(4) Just as the manna had come down from heaven, Jesus, the true bread, likewise **comes down from heaven**. Again, this pointed back to what John had said in his prologue about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling in our midst (1:14).

(5) The bread of God is the source of life for ***the world***. In John 3:16, “world” refers to all people—the sinful, prejudiced, immoral, gossiping, compromising, and arrogant—the hurting, wounded, battered, abused, mistreated, addicted, and bullied—all who are descendants of Adam. Whereas the manna in the wilderness was for the Jews, the true bread is the source of spiritual life for Jews and Gentiles, regardless of one’s race, culture, socio-economic strata, age, or ability.

VERSE 34

The people first requested Jesus to perform a sign (6:30-31). Next, they requested Him to ***give us this bread always***. This request proved the crowd had completely missed the point of everything Jesus had just said. They were still thinking of the bread they had the day before. They missed the spiritual truths that Jesus had just explained and were looking instead for something that could give them temporary satisfaction at best.

What is the significance of both manna and Jesus coming down from heaven? What did this say about Jesus?

SATISFIED (JOHN 6:35-40)

³⁵ “I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.” ³⁶ But as I told you, you’ve seen me, and yet you do not believe. ³⁷ Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

VERSE 35

Events in this chapter occurred near Passover (v. 4), the annual Jewish celebration that commemorated God delivering His people

from Egypt. At the first Passover, the Jews ate a meal according to the Lord's instructions. Then there was a miraculous crossing at the Red Sea. Afterward, the Lord provided manna from heaven. In John 6, Jesus fed a huge multitude. He then miraculously crossed the Sea of Galilee by walking on the water. Then, He explained that He is ***the bread of life*** that has ***come down from heaven***.

Neither manna nor bread could provide permanent relief from hunger. Jesus, though, is the eternal source of spiritual nourishment. The person who ***comes*** to Him and ***believes*** never hungers or thirsts again. To come to Him means to be willing to walk away from a life of sin; to believe means to trust Him fully as God's eternal Son and the ultimate and only sacrifice for our sins.

I am the bread of life is the first of seven “I am” statements Jesus made in John’s Gospel (see also 8:12; 10:7,9; 10:11,14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1,5). “I am” is God’s name as He revealed it to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:13-15). Each time Jesus used “I am,” He was connecting God’s power and authority to Himself, thereby affirming His divine status. With each “I am” statement, Jesus applied a Jewish concept about God to Himself.

BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

Compare God’s self-identification to Moses in Exodus 3:14 with Jesus’s “I am” statement in John 6:35. Consider other instances of “I am” found in John’s Gospel: John 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1,5. How did the Jews’ reaction (John 8:59) demonstrate that Jesus equated Himself with God? How could you use these statements to help a non-believer understand Jesus’s divine nature and mission?

VERSES 36-40

Verse 37 highlights the Father's role in salvation; He is the initiator (see also v. 44). John had made a similar declaration in the prologue to his Gospel (1:12-13). We cannot generate our own salvation, in part because "the heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable" (Jer. 17:9). Just as "the Lord opened" Lydia's heart so she would receive Paul's message of salvation (Acts 16:14), He opens ours.

The verse also states our responsibility—to come to Christ in faith. Note that our response is solely personal: ***the one who comes to me***. It is an individual's responsibility to come. No one can force you or come in your stead. The individuals who come to Christ ***will never*** be ***cast out***. Jesus emphasized this truth by declaring He would ***lose*** none of those whom the Father ***has given*** Him. What great declarations concerning the security of the believer!

Verse 40 serves as a kind of summary of verses 35-39. It explains why the Father sent Jesus: so those who saw Him would believe, have ***eternal life***, and be raised up ***on the last day***. To speak of having eternal life and being raised on the last day emphasizes the permanence of what Jesus was offering—especially in contrast to the temporary nature of the manna that appeared daily in the wilderness. How superior this true bread was to the manna.

The crowds came seeking bread that would not last. What Jesus offered is eternal. To receive Him is to never be spiritually hungry again.

How does belief in Jesus satisfy a person's spiritual hunger?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose and Grace*

Believers shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (See Psalm 97:10; 1 Peter 1:5.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- People must examine their motives for following Jesus.
- Believers find true nourishment in the truth of the gospel.
- A believer's security comes through faith in Jesus.

Discuss with your Bible study group how belief in Jesus produces spiritual nourishment or contentment. Record stories shared about how faith in Jesus brings satisfaction. How does hearing how Christ impacts others encourage you? Why is it important for the group to share about ways each person is expressing faith in Jesus in their daily lives?

Examine your life, looking for areas where you have tried to fill unseen longings with things that do not truly satisfy. What can you do this week to help replace temporary or counterfeit satisfaction with that which truly satisfies?

PRAYER NEEDS



He Sent Me

Jesus was sent by the Father so we could know the Father.

JOHN 7:14-29

Most of us remember teachers who positively impacted us. They may not have been our favorite teachers, but what set them apart was something beyond their likability. Their wisdom, experience, or honesty may have set them apart. The people of Jerusalem were evaluating Jesus's teaching, especially His authority. In the process, they were confronted with their own hypocrisy and lack of power.

What makes a teacher effective and memorable?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 7:1-53

Jesus was in Galilee, staying north because of a threat in Jerusalem and Judea: “the Jews were trying to kill him” (John 7:1). John had been introducing occurrences in which people were expressing opposition to what Jesus was saying and doing. In chapters 7 and 8, that conflict rises to a crescendo, as those who opposed Jesus tried to arrest and stone Him (7:32,44; 8:59).

Events in chapter 7 occurred near the time of the Jewish Festival of Shelters (v. 2). This annual celebration, also called the Festival of Booths or Festival of Ingathering, occurred in October, about six months after the events in chapter 6. An important part of the celebration occurred daily when the high priest, along with tens of thousands of other worshipers, walked from the temple mount down to the Pool of Siloam. There, the priest filled a golden pitcher with water. Afterward, everyone returned to the temple where the priest, with much fanfare, poured the water onto the altar. Pouring this water represented both a sacrifice and an act of faith that God would send the early rains. This also formed the backdrop for what Jesus said in John 7:37-38.

As the festival neared its midway point, Jesus entered the city and began to teach in the temple. The crowds argued about His identity. As the festival drew to a close, the religious leaders sent guards to arrest Him. Jesus proclaimed that whoever believed in Him would receive living water. He was speaking about the Holy Spirit who would be given following His resurrection and ascension. Astonished at His authority, the soldiers refused to act against Him. When the religious leaders argued that none of the Sanhedrin believed Jesus, Nicodemus argued that they should hear Jesus before condemning Him. With a sneering reply, the chief priests and Pharisees ended the debate and left the scene. They refused to believe Jesus was sent by God.

As you read through John 7:14-29, mark instances in which people were debating about Jesus’s identity. Why were people so divided by what Jesus was saying and doing?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FROM THE FATHER (JOHN 7:14-19)

¹⁴ When the festival was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. ¹⁵ Then the Jews were amazed and said, “How is this man so learned, since he hasn’t been trained?” ¹⁶ Jesus answered them, “My teaching isn’t mine but is from the one who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone wants to do his will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. ¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him. ¹⁹ Didn’t Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?”

VERSES 14-19

Jesus showed up in ***the temple*** about halfway through the festival and ***began to teach***. John offered no details about what Jesus taught. He explained, though, that the people were ***amazed***. The Jews had never heard anyone who lacked formal rabbinic training teach like this.

First-century rabbis regularly quoted and cited earlier Jewish teachers. In contrast, Jesus explained that His teaching, and by extension, His authority for teaching, had come from the One who ***sent*** Him, meaning God the Father. What Jesus taught had come directly from God (see Matt. 11:27).

In verse 15, the Jewish leaders challenged Jesus’s qualifications to teach. In verse 17, Jesus challenged their qualifications to receive His teaching. In doing so, He set up a contrast between Himself and the Jewish leaders.

Jesus explained that only those who chose to do God’s will would be able to discern spiritually whether His teaching had come from Himself or from God. Even rigorous rabbinic training could not provide that discernment; only having a faith-based relationship with God that resulted in obedience could produce spiritual understanding and clarity. Jesus was pointing out that He had perfect obedience to the Father, and they did not, which is why they did not recognize that His teaching had come from God.

Jesus further explained what distinguished His teaching. Those who spoke their own messages glorified only themselves. They put themselves in the spotlight. Jesus explained that His intent was to glorify the One who sent Him. He did not say that what He spoke was true but that He is **true**, a self-description repeated in John 14:6.

After evaluating their teaching as being self-promoting, Jesus highlighted their hypocrisy. They claimed to follow **Moses** and **the law**, which clearly prohibited murder (Ex. 20:13). Yet they had been looking for a means and opportunity **to kill** Him since He healed the disabled man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:18).

How do we know if a person's teachings are from God?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Education*

Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence.
(See Job 28:28; 2 Timothy 3:14-17.)

WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS (JOHN 7:20-24)

²⁰ “You have a demon!” the crowd responded. “Who is trying to kill you?” ²¹ “I performed one work, and you are all amazed,” Jesus answered. ²² “This is why Moses has given you circumcision — not that it comes from Moses but from the fathers — and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.” ²³ If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses won’t be broken, are you angry at me because I made a man entirely well on the Sabbath? ²⁴ Stop judging according to outward appearances; rather judge according to righteous judgment.”

VERSES 20-24

Shocked by what Jesus said, **the crowd responded** with rage: “**You have a demon!**” The Jerusalem crowd was made up of pilgrims visiting from Judea, Galilee, and regions east of the Jordan River. These

pilgrims were completely unaware of the Jewish leaders' plot against Jesus, thus they demanded to know: "**Who is trying to kill you?**"

Some Bible teachers believe the crowd did not mean Jesus had an actual demon. This is supported by the fact that the Pharisees and experts in Jewish law leveled the same charge against John the Baptist simply because he lived a self-denying lifestyle (Luke 7:33). They believe the accusation *you have a demon* was like someone calling Jesus "paranoid" or accusing Him of being "crazy," as some today casually use the word. Others, though, state the crowd believed Jesus was possessed by an evil spirit, which would have caused His paranoia (see John 10:20). This interpretation parallels other instances in which people said He was possessed. For instance, the scribes at one point accused Him of being possessed by Beelzebul and of working in concert with "the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22).

Regardless of what the crowd meant, they were wrong. Jesus certainly was not crazy or paranoid. Further, it would have been impossible for Jesus, God in the flesh, to be possessed by a demon. Jesus ignored the accusation.

The one work that Jesus performed was to heal a man on the Sabbath (John 5:1-10). The Jews were **amazed** not because of what the Father had done through Jesus but because the healed man had the audacity to violate the Sabbath by picking up his bedroll before he left.

The religious leaders considered themselves to be disciples of **Moses**. Thus, Jesus based His statement first on instructions Moses had given concerning circumcision (Ex. 12:43-49). He next stated that circumcision predated Moses and was based on the practice of **the fathers**, meaning the patriarchs (Gen. 17:9-14).

Jewish teachings instructed parents to circumcise their eight-day-old children, even on the Sabbath. Jesus moved from the lesser to the greater when He compared what God would allow. If God allowed a male child to be circumcised on the Sabbath, certainly He would not object to a grown man to be healed on the Sabbath. If the first was not a violation of the law, then surely the second would not be either.

Jesus made another lesser-to-greater comparison. They were judging based on **outward appearances** rather than a **righteous judgment** based on God's standards. If they would evaluate Him according to God's righteous judgment, they would see that Jesus was who He claimed to be (see 7:17).

Christians today do not face culture wars over circumcision, but we encounter other issues equally controversial. True spirituality requires application of inner faithfulness by glorifying Christ in the way we treat others as well as through the external ways of worship.

What makes seeing our own hypocrisy difficult?

THEY KNOW EACH OTHER (JOHN 7:25-29)

²⁵ Some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? ²⁶ Yet, look, he’s speaking publicly and they’re saying nothing to him. Can it be true that the authorities know he is the Messiah? ²⁷ But we know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know where he is from.”

²⁸ As he was teaching in the temple, Jesus cried out, “You know me and you know where I am from. Yet I have not come on my own, but the one who sent me is true. You don’t know him; ²⁹ I know him because I am from him, and he sent me.”

VERSES 25-27

These verses focus on one question: Was Jesus ***the Messiah***, or was He not? Those asking the question were ***the people of Jerusalem***. This phrase represents a third group in this chapter. The first had been the religious leaders, whom John called “the Jews” (vv. 11,15). The second was the crowd of pilgrims who traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the festival (v. 20). This third group was made up of people who lived in Jerusalem. These Jerusalemites would have heard about accusations Jewish leaders had made about this itinerant, upstart, trouble-making preacher from Nazareth.

The Jerusalemites put forth both sides of an argument. First, they wondered if maybe Jesus was the Messiah. The authorities had been saying they were going to kill Him. Yet, He had been ***speaking publicly*** without rebuke or repercussion. The word translated *publicly* can mean “boldly” or “confidently.”

John introduced a fourth group: ***the authorities***. These were members of the Sanhedrin, the rulers of the Jews (7:48). The Jewish

leaders had the power to arrest Jesus. With their influence, they also could ask the Romans to take Him into custody. Yet, they were **saying nothing to him**, which suggests they were not part of the crowd who debated with Jesus or accused Him of being demonized. Another interpretation could mean they spoke to Him from the safety of the crowd but did not confront Him with an arrest warrant. The Jerusalemites concluded that the silence and inaction of the authorities meant they must believe Jesus was the Messiah.

Second, the Jerusalemites considered that maybe Jesus wasn't the Messiah. They based this on the fact they knew where Jesus was from, meaning Galilee. He had lived in Nazareth before moving to Capernaum at the beginning of His ministry. Jews in that day believed that although the Messiah would be born of flesh and blood, his identity would remain a mystery until he began his work to set them free from oppression, which at this time meant the Romans. Hence the saying, **nobody will know where he is from**.

Part of the Jerusalemites' earlier sentence was correct; they understood **where this man is from**. What they didn't recognize, though, were the spiritual roots of His presence and purpose. Here, Jesus echoed what John had stated earlier: "No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he [the Son] has revealed him [the Father]" (1:18).

What are the dangers of not knowing the full facts about Jesus?

VERSES 28-29

The phrase **Jesus cried out** indicates He was about to make a solemn pronouncement (see also 1:15; 7:37; 12:44). At this point the discussion was over; Jesus was about to make His declaration.

Jesus was addressing all three groups. First, the Jewish leaders included rabbis, plus others who served as priests or volunteers in the temple, and maybe even some who were part of the Sanhedrin. Second, the pilgrims who traveled to attend the festival were clearly loyal to Judaism. Finally, He was speaking to the Jerusalemites, those who lived in the shadow of the temple with its sacrifices, songs, and incense.

Shockingly, Jesus stated, ***you don't know him; I know him because I am from him.*** He accused them of lacking a genuine relationship with the God they were supposed to be honoring at this very festival. What an indictment!

Jesus was not yet finished. He continued, ***and he sent me.*** Just as His teaching had come from the Father (v. 16), so had Jesus Himself. To reject the Messenger and His message was to also reject the One who sent Him. Although those at the temple were well versed in all things Jewish, there was still much they did not understand about the Father, and especially about His Messenger.

Jesus was not merely another teacher or healer. He was God the Son who came from heaven, took on human flesh, died for our sins, and was raised again. His mission was no less than the salvation of all people who will repent of sin and place their faith in Him.

What was the significance of Jesus saying God had sent Him? If they believed that were true, how would that validate Jesus and His message in the eyes of the Jews?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a concordance and/or Bible dictionary.*

Review an article on “Festivals” to better understand the Feasts of Shelters (also known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths). Compare passages identified in the article. Note why the Jews celebrate this feast. How did the feast serve as a fitting backdrop for Jesus’s teachings in John 7?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can trust the teachings of Jesus.
- Believers must examine their lives for hypocrisy.
- Believers confidently proclaim that Jesus was sent by the Father.

What actions can the group take to more readily help others understand that Jesus was sent by the Father so we could know the Father? Discuss how Jesus being sent by the Father impacts how the Bible study functions and should function in the future.

Knowing that the teaching of Jesus originated with the Father and is founded in righteousness and truth, how much time would you say you spend with the Lord in the Word per week? What changes can you make to improve the amount of time and the quality of time that you spend with God in His Word?

PRAYER NEEDS



I Am the Light

Jesus offers grace and forgiveness to all who repent and believe in Him.

JOHN 8:3-18

Mammoth Cave in south-central Kentucky is the largest known cave system in the world. The mapped system covers 420 miles. During guided tours, guests are given the opportunity to experience complete darkness. The Bible compares our sin-filled world to living in darkness. Just like turning on the lights provides comfort and direction when in a cave, Jesus provides light in our world. He brings hope and assurance to anyone who will receive Him.

What is the darkest place you have ever been in? What emotions did you experience?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 8:1-59

Following a confrontation at the temple, the Pharisees went to their houses while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem (8:1). He often spent entire nights praying in the garden of Gethsemane on the slopes of that famous mountain. His spiritual preparation was needed on the following morning as He returned to the temple and continued teaching near the treasury. Hoping to trap Him, the religious leaders brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. Demanding He say what should be done with her, these hypocrites were not interested in justice. They simply wanted to diminish Jesus in the eyes of the people. Confronting the Pharisees' insincerity, Jesus showed compassion toward the woman. At the same time, He warned her to sin no more.

After the woman's accusers silently slipped away, Jesus turned His attention to the crowd that had been listening. When He declared Himself to be the light of the world, the remaining Pharisees attacked Him more directly.

The scene led Jesus to reflect on the day when He would leave and they would not be able to find Him. The Jewish leaders couldn't comprehend this mysterious prophecy of His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Even some of the people who had begun to believe in Him were confused at His claim to offer truth that could set them free.

The Jews appealed to their heritage as Abraham's descendants. Jesus responded that Abraham had been given a vision of the Messiah and rejoiced. He went further and claimed to be the Anointed One. In doing so, Jesus employed the phrase "I am" that was uniquely associated with the name of God. Furious, the people took up stones to kill Him but Jesus left without injury because His time had not arrived.

Read John 8:3-18, paying close attention to how Jesus responded to those who opposed him. How do Jesus's actions complement His teachings?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

TRAPPED (JOHN 8:3-6)

³ Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. ⁴ “Teacher,” they said to him, “this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. ⁵ In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶ They asked this to trap him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse him. Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground with his finger.

VERSES 3-6

The religious leaders put Jesus to the test. They **brought a woman** who had been **caught in the act of committing adultery**. Scripture does not say why they did not bring the man as well. He too would have faced the same fate as the woman. These religious experts stated that the law of Moses **commanded** the woman be stoned to death. They challenged Jesus: **So what do you say?**

Exactly what did Old Testament law call for? It demanded that married individuals who committed adultery were to be put to death but it did not specify how. If, however, an engaged woman was unfaithful to her fiancé, both parties involved in the sexual encounter were to be stoned to death (Deut. 22:22-24).

Thus, if the woman was married, Old Testament law did not demand she be stoned. Further, if she was engaged to another man, then both parties involved in the sexual encounter were to be stoned. In this story, the man was nowhere to be found. Regardless of the woman’s marital status, these experts in the law were wrong in what they said *had* to be done.

Their motive, though, was not to enforce the law of Moses but **to trap** Jesus. They hoped His response would give them what they needed to **accuse him**. If Jesus disagreed the woman should be stoned, they would accuse Him of denying the Mosaic law. If He pronounced, “Stone her!” then the scribes and Pharisees could report to the Romans that He had defied their authority by pronouncing an execution. Sadly, in hopes of destroying Him, they proved they were willing to destroy this woman.

Jesus responded by stooping down and **writing on the ground with his finger**. Did He write the names of women He had seen with these men? Did He write Jeremiah 17:13, which states that those who turn away from God will be written in the dirt? Scripture does not reveal what He wrote.

How does self-righteousness get in the way of grace?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See Psalm 32:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22.)

FREED (JOHN 8:7-11)

⁷ When they persisted in questioning him, he stood up and said to them, “The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Then he stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. ⁹ When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only he was left, with the woman in the center. ¹⁰ When Jesus stood up, he said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ “No one, Lord,” she answered. “Neither do I condemn you,” said Jesus. “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

VERSES 7-8

What Jesus wrote did not discourage the woman’s accusers—**they persisted in questioning** Jesus. These indignant and judgmental men were evidently confident in their own righteousness—especially when they compared themselves to this woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery.

Ready to announce His decision, Jesus **stood up**. Shockingly, rather than say, “Stone her!” Jesus said, “**The one without sin among**

you should be the first to throw a stone at her." Can you imagine how high the tension was at that moment? Without saying another word, Jesus again ***stooped down*** and ***continued writing on the ground.***

No one could accuse Jesus of not upholding Jewish law. He had not disregarded or minimized the woman's sin. In fact, His instruction to be the first to cast a stone was in accord with an Old Testament law. It taught that if someone were found to be guilty of idolatry, then the accuser's hand was to be "the first against him to put him to death, and then the hands of all the people" (Deut. 13:9). So, the one(s) who had caught the woman in the act of adultery should have cast the first stone.

VERSES 9-11

Those who had attempted to indict the woman and trap Jesus had instead been indicted and trapped by their own sin. One can almost see their shoulders drooping as ***they left one by one.***

Why did ***the older men*** leave first? Maybe they had more sins to remember and thus recalled them more quickly. Maybe they were quicker to realize that Jesus had deflated their self-serving scheme. In a culture that gave deference to age, after the older men left, the younger men would have followed suit. For the younger men to stay after the older men had left could have been interpreted as an indictment against the older men's sinfulness.

After the men left, Jesus spoke to the woman for the first time. He used the culturally expected term, ***woman***, to address her. In no way did Jesus imply the woman was innocent. Quite the opposite, saying, "***Neither do I condemn you***" indicated Jesus knew she had sinned. Yet He was putting into practice what He said to Nicodemus, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). Rather than condemning her because of her sin, Jesus exercised His divine right to forgive her sin.

The final words Jesus spoke to the woman had to be truly liberating. He commanded her to walk away from her former life—a life marked by sin. He was not expecting her to live a sinless life; no one can. Yet He knew this experience would transform her. In the future she would be able to look back at this personal encounter with Jesus and say that was the moment that old things passed away and all things became new (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

Why is it easier to point out other people's sin rather than deal with our own?

BIBLE SKILL: *Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.*

Review John 1:4-5. Contrast Jesus's statements about the light of the world in John 8:12 and 9:5. Since Jesus is the Light of the world, what did He mean when He said that His disciples are "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14)? How did the apostle Paul add to this concept in Philippians 2:15? How can we shine the light of Christ's gospel on an unbelieving world (2 Cor. 4:4)?

SHINING (JOHN 8:12-18)

¹² Jesus spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life." ¹³ So the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying about yourself. Your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴ "Even if I testify about myself," Jesus replied, "My testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I'm going. But you don't know where I come from or where I'm going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards. I judge no one. ¹⁶ And if I do judge, my judgment is true, because it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ Even in your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. ¹⁸ I am the one who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me."

VERSE 12

Part of the nightly ritual during the Festival of Shelters included the lighting of a massive lamp, likely a menorah, in the temple's court of women. This rite was a reminder of the Lord leading His people in the wilderness with a pillar of fire at night (Ex. 13:21-22). This ceremony in the temple formed the backdrop of Jesus saying, ***I am the light of the world.***

In John's Gospel, this was the second of the seven "I am" statements Jesus made. The Jews would have understood His use of "I am" as Jesus equating Himself with God the Father. After all, this was the same name God had revealed for Himself to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:13-14).

The pillar of fire present during the wilderness wanderings had been a visible manifestation of God's presence with His people (Ex. 13:21). In this second "I am" statement, Jesus was identifying Himself as being the divine presence of God. He came, though, not just for the Jews but to be the light of *the world*. Accompanying this statement was the promise that ***anyone who follows*** Him would ***never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.*** Although the light is offered for all, only those who follow Him become its beneficiaries. Some scholars translate this last phrase as "the light that is life" or "the light that produces spiritual life." However, the syntax more accurately refers to how Jesus illuminates godly living. His presence exposed sins such as the hypocrisy of the religious leaders as well as the moral sin of the adulterous woman. Jesus also illuminates the path of anyone who follows Him. Not only is His Word a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105), but Jesus Himself lights our way.

John chapters 6, 7, and 8 include three comparisons of Jesus to a provision God made for His people during their wilderness wanderings. God provided manna, water, and light. Jesus referred to Himself as the manna that had come down from heaven (John 6:32-35); the source of living water (7:37-38); and the light for all who follow Him (8:12).

VERSES 13-18

The Pharisees called into question the ***testimony*** Jesus had given. They did not question the content of what Jesus said; rather, they

contested His words on a legal technicality. They said His testimony was ***not valid***, meaning not trustworthy. Jewish law required there to be two or three witnesses before a testimony was considered reliable (Num. 35:30; Deut. 19:15). Notice, though, that Jesus spoke of testifying about Himself, but not about testifying by Himself.

Jesus had earlier stated that He knew a testimony He gave about Himself would not be considered valid (John 5:31). Rather than argue this point with the Pharisees, He pointed out what He knew that they did not—where He had come from and where He was going. He understood that His origin and destination gave validity to His words about Himself. Their not knowing these essential elements about Jesus demonstrated they were not equipped to make a judgment about Him. Besides, any judgment they made would be based solely on ***human standards***.

The Father had given Jesus the authority to judge (John 5:27). The statement ***I judge no one*** should be understood as saying, “I judge no one by myself.” Jesus clarified this when He stated, ***it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.***

In verses 17-18, Jesus returned to the topic of having two required witnesses. He explained that He testified about Himself, and in His last statement Jesus named His supporting witness—the Father. Whereas the law required that a testimony had to be established by two witnesses, Jesus named the Creator of the universe as being His.

Earlier, Jesus had referred to God as “the one who sent me” (John 7:16,28,33). In explaining that God was both His co-judge and witness, Jesus identified God as *the Father* who sent Him. There’s a sense of intimacy in the title.

Layer upon layer, Jesus was strengthening His argument that His testimony was both reliable and true. He ultimately did so by joining Himself intimately with the God that the Pharisees claimed to know and follow themselves. The intimacy that Jesus shared with the Father validates that we can still rely on His words and promises for our lives today.

How do we know that Jesus can be trusted for telling the truth?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must be aware of the traps of judging others.
- Believers should seek to be agents of God's forgiveness.
- Believers can testify with confidence that Jesus offers forgiveness.

As a group, create a list of characteristics of a group that functions as agents of God's forgiveness. Using the characteristics listed, evaluate how well your group functions as these types of agents. How can the group be agents of God's forgiveness to a greater degree?

Think about your own life. When you see others doing wrong, for what mistakes are you more likely to demand justice? For which faults do you extend grace? Be ready to discuss your answers with your Bible study group. What can you do this week to extend grace and forgiveness?

PRAYER NEEDS



You Have Seen Him

Jesus reveals truth to those who seek Him.

JOHN 9:24-38

Many of us take endless photos on our phones, each with a story. Some photos carry greater significance than others, especially if the scene is a once-in-a-lifetime moment or our first time to see a place, thing, or person. We can get frustrated when others do not find our photos important or if they question the image. A man born blind was granted sight by Jesus, while some who had sight became blinded to the truth and tried to discredit him.

What is your favorite personal photograph? Why do you treasure that image?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 9:1-41

Following His confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus left the temple and encountered a man who had been born blind. His disciples posed a theological question that revealed their lack of spiritual understanding. Like many people, they associated illness with sin. With their limited insight, the disciples were looking for cause and effect. Certainly, sin results in God's chastisement, but not all illness is triggered by sin.

Jesus revealed that God allows some conditions to occur to demonstrate His glory. Sometimes the Lord gains praise through healing, as He did with this man. In other situations, Christians glorify God by the way they respond to His grace during their infirmity. This story not only magnifies God's power as the blind man gained sight, but also the greater blessing of his becoming a believer in Christ.

Jesus made mud from dust and spit to apply on the man's eyelids. Perhaps the combination of submitting to this strange application and the act of washing tested the man's willingness to believe and obey.

As with other healings on Sabbath days, Jesus's action provoked the Pharisees when they learned of the healing. With self-righteous superiority, they rebuked the healed man for his testimony about Jesus. They even brought the man's parents into the dispute, not accepting the fact that he was born blind. Finally, because of the man's persistent affirmation of Jesus, the Pharisees threw him out of the synagogue.

Compassionately, Jesus sought the man and revealed Himself as the Messiah. The man believed Jesus and received a greater blessing than physical sight. The unbelieving Pharisees, however, remained spiritually blind because of the hardness of their hearts.

As you read John 9:24-38, identify words and phrases that are expressions of faith in Jesus. How does the faith of the formerly blind man grow?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

I CAN SEE! (JOHN 9:24-25)

²⁴ So a second time they summoned the man who had been blind and told him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether or not he’s a sinner, I don’t know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!”

VERSES 24-25

The backdrop for the story in John 9 was the belief in a connection between sin and suffering. Jews believed if a person was suffering, he must have sinned; and if a person sinned, he would suffer.

Deuteronomy 28 stated that if the Israelites walked in disobedience, the Lord would afflict them with blindness (v. 28). By the time of the New Testament, Jews had come to believe if someone was born blind, either the parents or the newborn must have sinned.

Jesus and the disciples saw a beggar who was blind from birth. Jesus explained to His disciples that the man had been born blind not because of sin but “so that God’s works might be displayed in him” (John 9:3). He made a mud mixture with His own saliva, put it on the man’s eyes, and sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. After doing so, the man returned, seeing.

The Pharisees interrogated the man whom Jesus healed. Not getting the answers they sought, they interrogated the man’s parents. Fearful of being excluded from the synagogue, the father and mother simply attested to the fact that their son was born blind and now was able to see. The Pharisees turned their attention once again to the man who could now see and interrogated him again.

The religious leaders gave the man an imperative: ***Give glory to God.*** They were instructing the man to give credit to God rather than to Jesus. Additionally, this was a demand that the man honor God with truthful words rather than continue with what they thought was an obvious lie about how he had been healed.

Next, the Pharisees emphatically declared about Jesus: ***We know that this man is a sinner.*** The basis for this statement was the fact Jesus had healed the blind man on the Sabbath, which meant He certainly was “not from God” (v. 16).

Jewish interpretation of the law would allow someone to perform an action to save a person's life on the Sabbath if the individual was in danger. This man faced no such threat. Jewish law prohibited putting a saliva mixture on one's eyes on the Sabbath. Additionally, to make mud by mixing saliva and dirt was viewed as kneading dough, which was also prohibited on the Sabbath. To violate the Sabbath in such a way was seen as rebellion against God. The Pharisees were certain they were on solid footing when they referred to Jesus as ***a sinner***.

The man, though, stood his ground. He refused to say whether the One who healed him was a sinner. Instead, he stubbornly held to and proclaimed the one fact he knew for certain: ***I was blind, and now I can see.***

The man who had been born blind was not ready for a theological discussion. He could, though, testify about what had happened to him. Jesus had moved him from the realm of darkness to light.

How did the Pharisees' traditions and beliefs keep them from seeing the truth about Jesus? How can our beliefs and traditions get in the way of accepting the truth?

YOU CAN'T SEE? (JOHN 9:26-34)

²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ “I already told you,” he said, “and you didn’t listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don’t want to become his disciples too, do you?” ²⁸ They ridiculed him: “You’re that man’s disciple, but we’re Moses’s disciples.” ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses. But this man — we don’t know where he’s from.” ³⁰ “This is an amazing thing!” the man told them. “You don’t know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes.” ³¹ We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does his will, he listens to him. ³² Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he wouldn’t be able to do anything.” ³⁴ “You were born entirely in sin,” they replied, “and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out.

VERSES 26-27

The Pharisees maintained their united front, **they asked him** exactly what had happened. Unfazed by their authority and social importance, this beggar stood up to one of the most respected, established, and intimidating Jewish groups of his day. They had to be caught off guard when the man masterfully turned the tables, challenged their motives, and put them on the offensive. Reading verse 27, one can imagine the religious leaders' anger upon hearing the man's correction, **I already told you and you didn't listen.** How dare he disrespect them! The beggar, though, was not finished; he delivered his strongest punch: **You don't want to become his disciples too, do you?**

VERSES 28-29

These two verses get at the heart of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Jewish religious leaders claimed their authority came directly from God; after all, the Lord had spoken with Moses face to face. The Lord gave His covenant directly to Moses (Ex. 33:11; 34:10-28). This was the authority on which these leaders stood.

What these leaders did not understand, though, was that Jesus was God in the flesh. He was not competing against Moses. In fact, Moses had written about Him (John 5:45-46).

The man had hit a nerve. The Pharisees, trying to regain their footing, mocked the uneducated beggar: **you're that man's disciple.** One can sense the contempt in their words. They then stated why they considered themselves superior: **we're Moses's disciples.**

In saying **we know**, the Pharisees were maintaining their united and dogmatic front. Again, they were highlighting their authority as opposed to this beggar's feeble status. The Pharisees knew where Moses's words had come from: **God has spoken to Moses** Himself. Where Jesus had come from—wherever that was—comparatively had to be completely insignificant. Therefore, they thought His words were inconsequential.

VERSES 30-34

The healed man continued to prove himself well versed in Jewish teachings. He pointed out that **God doesn't listen to sinners** (see Isa. 1:15)—but He does listen to the **God-fearing** ones who obey

Him (see Prov. 15:29). The Pharisees likely agreed with what the man was saying, so far. The healed man continued, pointing out that the miracle he had experienced was unique in all of history. He concluded by stating that for Jesus to have done what He did, He had to be **from God**. The man argued that the fact Jesus opened his eyes was proof that God was with Him. The Pharisees' attacks on Jesus failed because the evidence could not be refuted. A man born blind was conversing with them with full capability of sight. He maintained, ***if this man were not from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything.***

Trapped by the man's logic, the Pharisees responded by attacking the man himself. They hurled at the beggar the accusation they had made about Jesus—both were sinners (v. 24). They went further, saying the man had been **born entirely in sin**, the possibility the disciples had raised (v. 2). How dare this illiterate beggar try to teach these theological teachers theology! Having nothing else in their arsenal, they **threw him out**, meaning out of the synagogue (see v. 22).

Tragically, the Pharisees had become so engulfed in their own anger that they failed to remember God had promised that the blind would receive sight at the dawn of the messianic age (Isa. 35:1-5; 42:5-7). Rather than recognize the moment for what it was, they focused only on preserving their piety, status, and authority—even if doing so meant they failed to recognize the Messiah, the Son of God. People may debate theological points, but they cannot deny the change Jesus works in us. The most effective apologetic may not lie in doctrinal arguments, but in the witness of a transformed life.

What makes a person's changed life a powerful means for sharing about Jesus?

I CAN REALLY SEE! (JOHN 9:35-38)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and when he found him, he asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ "Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?" he asked. ³⁷ Jesus answered,

“You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”³⁸ “I believe, Lord!” he said, and he worshiped him.

VERSES 35-36

Reading through the other Gospels, we see more instances of Jesus healing blind people than any other miracle. (See Matt. 9:27-31; 12:22-23; 15:29-31; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Luke 7:20-22.) Yet what Jesus did with this man who had been born blind was unique—He afterwards looked until he **found him**.

As He commonly did, Jesus began the conversation with a question. To **believe** did not mean simply to accept facts about the Son of Man. Jesus was asking the man if he put his trust in Him, the Son of Man, for forgiveness and salvation.

The term **Son of Man** was a favorite self-designation for Jesus. Daniel used the term to refer to the Messiah (Dan. 7:13). Echoing that usage, Jesus used the title to emphasize both His humanity and His identity as the Messiah.

BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

Use a concordance to make a list of the occurrences of the title “Son of Man” in the Gospel of John. Review the verses, paying attention to the surrounding passages. How do these passages help you understand Jesus’s teaching about Himself? Write a summary of your findings.

Maybe the blind man had earlier heard Jesus refer to Himself as the “light of the world” (v. 5). Yet, after he was healed, he referred to Jesus by name and later called Him “a prophet” (vv. 11,17). What he did not know, however, was that Jesus was the long-awaited Son

of Man. The question, ***who is he***, indicated the man was longing to place his faith in Him and to leave behind the cultural and religious traditions of his day. The man was prepared to follow the ***Son of Man***.

How does knowing Jesus's identity move a person to have faith in Him?

VERSES 37-38

Jesus could have responded, "I am He." Instead, He referred to the man's healing as one evidence of the Messiah's identity: ***You have seen him.*** Lest there be any doubt as to His meaning, Jesus told the man, ***he is the one speaking with you.*** He used a similar statement in His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:26). Jesus wanted the man to understand exactly who He was.

Realizing Jesus was the Son of Man, the man responded in two ways. First, he believed, meaning he accepted the truth of who Jesus was. Second, he worshiped Jesus. Interestingly, this is the only occurrence in John's Gospel of someone worshiping Jesus before His crucifixion and resurrection (20:24-28). This man's response is a reminder that worship is the natural response for anyone who has had a life-changing experience with Jesus.

The unnamed beggar had begun the day both physically and spiritually blind. All that changed because of his encounter with Jesus.

Why is worship the natural response of one whose life has been changed because of Jesus?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism and Missions*

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. (See Isaiah 49:6; John 20:21.)

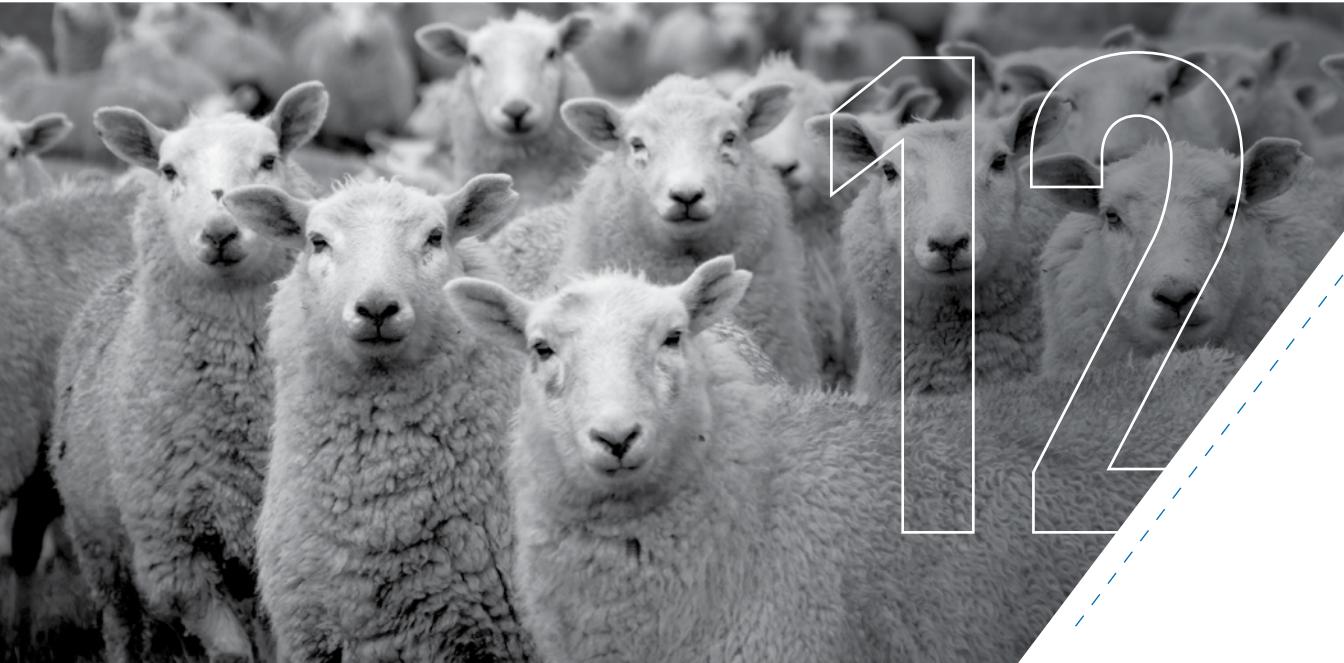
APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must examine their beliefs in light of the Scriptures.
- Believers can share with others the difference Jesus makes in their lives.
- Believers can worship Jesus in faith and action.

How can your Bible study group help those who are seeking to know the truth about Jesus? What actions can the group take to find and engage with people wanting to know about Jesus?

Not everybody has a dramatic story to tell about how they met Jesus. How was your life changed because of Jesus? Who do you think might benefit from hearing about how you came to be a follower of Jesus? Share with them.

PRAYER NEEDS



I Know My Own

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep.

JOHN 10:7-14,25-30

Home security is a huge business. We can install a security system ourselves or use professionals to install it, and we can self-monitor or use a company. We want to feel we are secure and the things we possess are secure. In Bible times, shepherds served as security systems that protected sheep. Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd, explaining that He protected His sheep.

List products and systems people use to keep their homes secure. How would you rate the items you listed from most effective to least effective?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 10:1-42

Jesus often used parables, metaphors, and similes to teach spiritual truths through stories ordinary people could understand. In chapter 10, Jesus used two important word pictures. He likened Himself to a gate and a Good Shepherd. Jesus was both the gate by which the sheep entered the sheepfold and the Good Shepherd who called them forth. No one can legitimately enter without going through the gate—Jesus.

Jesus condemned the religious leaders who tried to steal sheep. A thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. In contrast, Jesus came to give eternal and abundant life. Unlike the thief who wants to harm the sheep, Jesus the Good Shepherd came to love, protect, and care for the sheep. The sheep represent those who know Jesus—believers. When the Good Shepherd calls His sheep, they follow Him because they know His voice. They are familiar with Him and know He loves them. Fed by His hand, they go where He leads.

Jesus the Good Shepherd loves His flock so much that He laid down His life for them. He was not a hired hand who fled when threatened by a predator. One might understand why the hireling would run away since the sheep are not his. The Good Shepherd does not seek to escape when an enemy approaches. He protects His flock even to the point of sacrificing His life.

The Pharisees interrupted Jesus's teaching and demanded He clearly state whether He was the Messiah. He had already made His identity clear, but they refused to believe. They became enraged when Jesus claimed to be one with the Father. They tried to kill Him, but He escaped and traveled to the Jordan River where John formerly baptized. People there remarked that even John never did works like Jesus, and many of them believed in Him.

As you read John 10:7-14,25-30 in your Bible, highlight each time Jesus used the pronoun “I” when referring to Himself. How would you summarize what these uses teach about Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GATE (JOHN 10:7-10)

⁷ Jesus said again, “Truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn’t listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

VERSES 7-10

Truly I tell you indicates that Jesus was about to teach an important truth. What follows is His explanation of the parable in verses 1-5. These verses contain the first of two ways Jesus identified His role in the parable: **I am the gate for the sheep**. The imagery is of the shepherd who guards the sheep by sleeping in the opening in the sheepfold. Doing so, the shepherd literally placed himself between the flock and any predators or thieves.

Toward the end of the day, the shepherd would lead the sheep into a pen known as a sheepfold. A shepherd might construct a permanent sheepfold by stacking stones into a large, almost-enclosed area. He would put briars and brambles on the top of the stone wall. If a wolf or fox tried to get to the sheep, it would get entangled in the branches on top of the wall. Often the sheepfold backed up to a cave, which provided protection from inclement weather. A temporary sheepfold would be similar, except it would be made of just briars and brambles.

The opening in the sheepfold wall provided access into and out of the enclosure. A hired guard, a servant, or often a shepherd himself would sleep in the opening, serving as the sheepfold’s door. Shepherds led their flocks out of the sheepfolds in the morning. Each shepherd had a unique call; only his sheep would come if multiple flocks had shared the sheepfold.

Jesus depicted **all who came before** Him as **thieves and robbers**. These were the religious leaders and false messiahs of His day. Describing them, Jesus used two words. *Thieves* is a translation of the Greek word *kleptes*, from which we get “kleptomaniac.” The term referred to those who typically stole in secret but were not violent.

Sheep and goats were often nabbed by thieves. *Robbers*, however, were bandits, often armed, who worked in groups to attack and steal from caravans and travelers—such as those mentioned in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30). The two men crucified with Jesus were robbers (Matt. 27:38). Jesus said His sheep ***didn't listen to*** or follow the false messiahs and religious leaders with self-focused agendas.

In verse 9, Jesus repeated, ***I am the gate*** (see also v. 7). The pronouncement is a reminder that Jesus was speaking allegorically. A sheepfold had only one entrance. In referring to Himself as *the gate*, Jesus was affirming that He is the only way to enter and to become part of the family or flock of God (see John 14:6).

Jesus repeated the ***if anyone*** formula found earlier (John 6:51; 7:17; 8:51), which included a promise of eternal life. Jesus also picked up on the Old Testament imagery of God's people enjoying blessings and protection (Ps. 121:7-8). To be saved, to ***come in*** and ***go out***, and to ***find pasture*** highlighted the sheep's security from the thieves, robbers, and other predators.

As opposed to ***a thief*** who comes to ***steal*** a sheep to slaughter it for food, Jesus came to offer ***life***—abundant and free. It is a life that gives believers meaning, purpose, and satisfaction for their days on earth. Additionally, this life is eternal; it extends beyond the grave. Only through Christ can we experience the overwhelming joy of what God intends our lives to be.

How does Jesus serve as the gate into abundant life?

THE TRUE SHEPHERD (JOHN 10:11-14)

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”¹² The hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn’t own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them.
¹³ This happens because he is a hired hand and doesn’t care about the sheep.¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me,

VERSE 11

Whereas Jesus earlier identified Himself as the gate for the sheep, in these verses He referred to Himself as ***the good shepherd***. The Greek word translated *good* describes someone noble or worthy. Jesus is not one of many good shepherds. He, *the good shepherd*, has no equal.

Jesus did the work a shepherd should do—caring for sheep, leading them, rescuing those that had gone astray, and making sure they were fed, well-watered, and protected. Those actions would be expected of an adequate shepherd. Jesus, though, was beyond adequate; He was the model of what an ideal shepherd should be. Jesus stated what set Him apart; He willingly ***lays down his life for the sheep***. The phrase *lays down his life* appears uniquely in John's writings (John 10:11,17-18; 13:37-38; 15:13; 1 John 3:16). Jesus used the term to refer to His voluntary, sacrificial, and atoning death.

For a shepherd to give his life for his sheep was rare and certainly not expected. A shepherd might die by accident while attending his flock but certainly not intentionally. A shepherd needed to be alive to care for his flock. The word *for* in the phrase *for the sheep* is significant. It does not mean Jesus gave His life as an example or as a way to inspire His flock of followers. It means that when the sheep are facing mortal danger, He gets between the sheep and the predator. He fights and dies so the sheep don't have to.

How do people recognize Jesus as the true Shepherd?

VERSES 12-14

The good shepherd stood in stark contrast to both “the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock” (Zech. 11:17) and the ***hired hand*** who ***leaves*** the sheep, ***runs away*** when threatened, and ***doesn't care about the sheep***.

The intent of thieves, robbers, and wolves was to harm the animals. The *hired hand* was responsible for providing protection and security. By *hired hand*, Jesus was referring to Jewish religious leaders, each of whom was paid for his service. In the parable, the hired hand's concern was not for the sheep—but that he got paid.

Two things indicate the hired hand ***doesn't own the sheep***: he abandons the sheep when they are threatened and does not care about the sheep. Shepherds take great risks because they do care about their sheep. There is a bond between the animals and their owner. Verse 14 emphasizes that relationship. Jesus reiterated that He is the Good Shepherd who knows His own sheep and they ***know*** Him. The Greek word translated *know* doesn't mean to have information about something. Instead of knowing in the head, it carries the idea of knowing in the heart—of having a deeply personal relationship based on mutual trust and respect. Jesus likened this relationship to what He shares with the Father (v. 15). This type of heart connection is possible because the flock is His own sheep—again, in contrast to the hired hand.

Since Jesus loved us enough to lay down His life on the cross for us, He will withhold nothing good on behalf of His people. We need not fear the attacks of evil nor quake at harmful circumstances. Our Shepherd remains close at hand to provide, lead, care, and defend.

How does the contrast between the hired hand and the Good Shepherd help us understand Jesus's purpose?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

On a separate sheet of paper, create a two-column list. In the first column include descriptions of the sheep and the Good Shepherd from John 10. In the second column, write aspects found in Psalm 23. What insights from Psalm 23 help you appreciate John 10?

THE SECURING SHEPHERD (JOHN 10:25-30)

²⁵ “I did tell you and you don’t believe,” Jesus answered them. “The works that I do in my Father’s name testify about me. ²⁶ But you don’t believe because you are not of my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear

my voice, I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.** ²⁹ **My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.** ³⁰ **I and the Father are one."**

VERSES 25-27

Perplexed by what Jesus had been teaching, the Jews demanded He reveal plainly whether He was the Messiah (v. 24). They were looking for ammunition to use against Him.

Jesus Himself had told them on numerous occasions (John 5:39-47; 8:12-18,58). In fact, He had been telling who He was for over three years, yet they did not believe. Also, the **works** Jesus had been doing signified He was the Messiah. These works included the miracles Jesus performed and the messages He preached and taught. Everything Jesus had done pointed to the fact He was the Messiah. However, He was not the type of Messiah people were expecting—thus they didn't believe. Although the truth was before them, they rejected it (John 1:11).

When teaching about His sheep, Jesus explained the connection between the sheep and shepherd. In doing so, He stressed ownership, hearing, and obedience.

- Ownership: the shepherd “calls *his own sheep* by name . . . when he has brought all *his own* outside, he goes ahead of them . . . I know my own [sheep], and *my own* know me” (10:3,4,14, emphasis added).
- Hearing: “the sheep hear his [the shepherd’s] voice . . . they know his voice” (vv. 3,4).
- Obedience: “The sheep follow him” (v. 4).

The Jews who surrounded Jesus in the temple complex were **not of** His **sheep** (v. 26). They did not **hear** His voice and did not **follow** Him. Jesus did not know them, meaning He did not have that deep, heart-based relationship with them.

Verse 27 is a reminder of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ Then I will announce to them, *I never knew you.* Depart from me, you lawbreakers!” (Matt 7:22-23, emphasis added). One cannot imagine hearing more dreadful or sadder words.

VERSES 28-30

This text clearly and succinctly teaches the eternal security of the believer in Christ. Those who receive God's gift of eternal life will ***never perish***. Death will not win. Believers pass from temporal life to eternal life. By its very definition, eternal life never ends.

The phrase at the beginning of verse 28, ***I give them***, is a reminder that salvation is a gift (see Eph. 2:8). There is nothing we can do to earn salvation and nothing we might do to lose it. Therefore, the believer's salvation is secure.

Our faith is not based on our ability to hold onto God; at best, we are weak. It is based on the firm **hand** of Jesus and of the Father—both of whom hold us securely. To be held in the hand of Christ is to be held in the hand of God, since the two are one.

The Father ***is greater than all*** who would seek to harm us—all the thieves, robbers, religious hired hands, false prophets, deceivers, earthly rulers, forces of darkness, and even the devil himself. No one can snatch us out of God's hand; we are secure in Christ.

Jesus and ***the Father are one***—one in intent, action, nature, and essence. In the task of holding securely onto the sheep, they are one. The Father and the Son embrace us with unrelenting power and love. As is often stated, God does the saving and God does the securing. Our role is to respond in faith.

How does Jesus's promise of eternal life bring peace to a person's life?

KEY DOCTRINE: God's Purpose and Grace

Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. [See Malachi 3:6; 2 Timothy 1:12.]

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers find abundant life through faith in Jesus.
- Believers can trust Jesus to protect them.
- Believers can know that they are secure in Jesus's hand.

Discuss as a group the dangers faced by believers today. How are the dangers faced by those far from God like those who are close to God? What might your Bible study group do to offer support for those who are threatened today?

What hinders us from hearing the voice of Jesus and following Him? What changes might we need to make this week to walk more closely to Him so you can more easily hear His voice?

PRAYER NEEDS



13

IAm the Resurrection

Jesus is sovereign over all creation.

JOHN 11:32-46

Some funerals are different than others. Services for deceased who were not believers seem to have a sense of finality. In contrast, while Christian families grieve, they know they will see their loved ones again. Faith in the resurrected Christ and His promise of eternal life comforts them. The funeral of a believer is not a final goodbye but a temporary farewell until they meet again, where sadness will melt into joy.

**What is the most memorable funeral service you have ever attended?
Explain.**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 11:1-57

Having received word that His friend, Lazarus, was sick, Jesus deliberately delayed going to him. He waited until Lazarus was dead for several days so Lazarus's family and the people around Bethany might witness His resurrection power and glorify the Father. At first, Jesus's disciples tried to dissuade Him from going so close to Jerusalem since the Jews there had tried to kill Him. Thomas courageously urged his companions to go along even if it meant dying with Jesus.

Once they arrived in Bethany, Jesus was met by Lazarus's sisters. Each sister expressed regret that Jesus delayed coming to see Lazarus. They knew if He had been present, their brother would not have died. Jesus timed His delay, in part, to challenge them to greater faith. He spoke specifically to Martha twice—once to encourage her faith in Him as the resurrection and the life, then later at Lazarus's tomb to remind her to believe so she might see God's power.

The Jewish leaders were becoming more determined to destroy Jesus. Jesus's bringing Lazarus back from the dead fueled their determination. The miracle caused many people to believe in Jesus. Consequently, the chief priests and leaders of the Sanhedrin were determined to destroy Lazarus as well as Jesus.

During the Sanhedrin's conference about what to do, Caiaphas defended their plans for Jesus's death. He declared it was better for one man to die than for the entire nation to perish. He was speaking in political terms. Caiaphas did not comprehend that the Holy Spirit spoke through him to prophesy the meaning behind Jesus's death. As Messiah, Jesus would indeed die to atone for the sins of the world.

Read John 11:32-46 in your Bible. How does this story serve as a bookend to how Jesus was introduced in John 1 (in Him was life [1:4]; the darkness did not overcome the light [1:5]; His own people did not receive him [1:11]; and we observed His glory [1:14])?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WEPT (JOHN 11:32-37)

³² As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died!” ³³ When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you put him?” he asked. “Lord,” they told him, “come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Couldn’t he who opened the blind man’s eyes also have kept this man from dying?”

VERSES 32-37

As Jesus neared Bethany, Martha came to meet Him, “but Mary remained seated in the house” (v. 20). Jewish tradition dictated mourners remain seated for a week after a loved one died. As a show of support, others would console and serve them. After talking to Jesus, Martha spoke with Mary, who then came running to Jesus.

Seeing Jesus, Mary **fell at his feet**. When Jesus earlier visited Mary and Martha, Martha busied herself with food preparation; Mary sat at His feet, listening to Jesus teach (Luke 10:38-42). John’s Gospel later records that while Jesus was at a dinner given in His honor, Mary anointed His feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair (12:1-8). Her actions displayed honor, humility, and worship.

Mary echoed what Martha had said: **Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died** (see v. 21). The word translated **crying** suggests wailing or sobbing loudly. Mary was visibly shaken.

How should we respond to people who are hurting? Should our response vary from person to person? Explain.

Jesus responded differently to Mary than He had to Martha. Rather than give facts as He had with Martha (see vv. 25-26), Jesus responded emotionally. He was **deeply moved in his spirit**. The Greek phrase translated *deeply moved* can describe a horse’s snorting

The action expressed displeasure, annoyance, and even anger and indignation. His being **troubled** indicated an intense reaction.

Scripture does not say why Jesus was angry. He may have been upset at death itself and the way it hurts those who grieve. He may have been angry with those accompanying Mary; standing before the “resurrection and the life,” they were responding like nonbelievers who had no hope (v. 25; 1 Thess. 4:13).

In this scene bathed in intense emotion, **Jesus wept**. The Greek word used here is different from the loud sobbing Mary had done. Jesus was crying silently. He wasn’t upset about Lazarus dying; He was about to raise Lazarus back to life. Jesus wept because **he loved** Lazarus. Some have suggested that Jesus wept because He was about to bring Lazarus back into a world of sin, sickness, suffering, sadness, and separation; thus His heart was broken.

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar events in Scripture.*

Compare Jesus’s reaction when He raised two other persons from the dead: Mark 5:21-43; Luke 7:11-17. Why was His response different in the case of Lazarus’s death? Read Luke 19: 41-44. In what ways was Jesus’s lamentation over Jerusalem different from His weeping at the tomb of Lazarus?

Rather than recognize the Lord’s love and compassion in the moment, some began to criticize. Knowing Jesus had recently healed the blind man, they mocked. **Couldn’t he . . . have kept this man from dying?** Why didn’t Jesus do something when He could?

Jesus not only comprehends our pain but goes further and does something about it. Sometimes He heals and restores. Even when His purpose does not eliminate the source of pain, He grants grace and

strength during suffering. Through it all, His love and presence are constant and dependable.

How does Jesus's emotional response help us approach Him with our hurts and pains?

BELIEVE (JOHN 11:38-40)

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ “Remove the stone,” Jesus said. Martha, the dead man’s sister, told him, “Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

VERSES 38-40

The text refers to the **tomb** of Lazarus as a **cave**. Some cave tombs had a vertical entrance shaft and others, a horizontal entrance. Inside the tomb were carved shelves or niches on which a body was placed. Poorer families buried multiple bodies in one tomb; a private tomb indicated wealth. A **stone** was placed at the mouth of the cave. This kept the body from being robbed or scavenged by animals; the sealed tomb also helped contain decomposition odors.

DID YOU KNOW?

Visitors to Bethany today can visit what is believed to have been Lazarus’s tomb. Stepping over the threshold at street level, one descends twenty-four stone steps before entering a small vestibule. In the vestibule floor are three more stone steps that lead down to an inner chamber that measures about seven-by-eight feet. It contains three burial niches. Jesus was likely standing in the vestibule when He said, “Remove the stone” (John 11:39).

For the second time, the account states Lazarus had ***been dead four days*** (see v. 17). This occurred because Jesus had waited two days before going to Bethany. First-century Jews believed a person's soul lingered for three days after death. At the end of the three days, the body would begin decomposition, and the soul would leave. The odor itself would give evidence that Lazarus had not merely swooned but was indeed dead.

How do our past experiences get in the way of demonstrating faith in Jesus?

Jesus assured Martha that she was about to witness ***the glory of God***. This echoed what Jesus had said earlier to His disciples: "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v. 4). Lazarus's sickness had led to death, but that was not the final chapter. God's glory was about to be revealed in a powerful way. This glory would be evident to Martha if she ***believed***, which she earlier stated she did (v. 27).

If we have only the Word of God to carry us through the day, that is enough.

Those standing at the tomb had no idea what Jesus was about to do. Anything they imagined would pale in comparison to what they were about to see. Martha's faith should have rested solely on Jesus's word: ***Didn't I tell you . . . If we have only the Word of God to carry us through the day, that is enough.*** Martha was acting on the basis of human rationale rather than trusting the word and power of Jesus.

In what ways has God's Word helped you follow His will even when you didn't understand it?

RETURNED (JOHN 11:41-46)

⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. ⁴² I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.” ⁴³ After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.” ⁴⁵ Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he did believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

VERSES 41-42

Before acting, Jesus prayed twice; only the second prayer is recorded. This audible prayer was an expression of thanksgiving, not a request or petition. Jesus was grateful because He knew the Father had **heard** His prayer, as He **always** did. This expression of thanksgiving by Jesus was like the psalmist’s declaration of gratitude to God: “I will give thanks to you because you have answered me . . .” (Ps. 118:21). The reason Jesus prayed aloud was so those standing with Him at the tomb might **believe** God had sent Him. The prayer Jesus uttered serves a reminder that we too should express gratitude for answered prayer.

How do we know that God hears us when we pray?

VERSES 43-44

Using **a loud voice** was not for Lazarus’s benefit; Jesus wanted to make sure no one could misinterpret what He said: **Lazarus, come out!** Then in a remarkable display of the Lord’s power over life and death, Lazarus stepped out of the tomb.

John's description confirms Jewish burial practices of the first century. A Jewish burial typically took place on the day a person died. Prior to placing the body in the tomb, the body was washed (Acts 9:37), anointed (John 12:3-7), and wrapped in strips of linen cloth. The face and head were wrapped in a separate piece of cloth. When Jesus was buried, His body was similarly treated (John 20:5-7).

In His third command, Jesus told them to **unwrap** Lazarus's body so that he could move freely. The first and third commands (vv. 39,44) involved those with Jesus: move the stone and unwrap Lazarus. The second command (v. 43) involved the Lord's friend and humanity's final enemy: Lazarus and death (John 11:11; 1 Cor. 15:26).

VERSES 45-46

When Jesus performed miracles or taught, some would believe while others would ridicule, accuse Him of being evil, or even become hostile. We see this most recently after He healed the man born blind (John 9:16) and taught about being the good shepherd (10:19-21). Verses 45-46 highlight that same mixed response.

John reported that **many . . . saw what he did** and **believed in him**. But some rushed to tell **the Pharisees . . . what Jesus had done**. At best, they wanted the people who had threatened Jesus to know about His power to raise the dead. At worst, these persons were concerned with maintaining favor with their religious leaders. Subsequent verses emphasize the result of their actions as the Pharisees and others increased their efforts to kill not only Jesus, but also Lazarus who was a living testimony to Jesus's power.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior. (See Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 1:17.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- Jesus understands the hurts of humanity.
- Believers demonstrate their faith through obedience.
- Believers can approach God knowing He hears them.

Rate the prayer life of your Bible study group. How does the prayer of the group demonstrate belief that Jesus is sovereign over all creation? Discuss with your Bible study group what can improve. Take actions to implement steps to address the areas identified as needing improvement.

Take a personal inventory. Are there areas in which you say, “I believe” but are still reluctant to act? Is there something the Lord has been instructing or leading you to do but, for whatever reason, you have not yet taken that step? What can be done to move you towards full obedience?

PRAYER NEEDS

Sabbath Laws of the First Century



- By law, Jews could not sell anything to a non-Jew if what was sold would not reach its destination before the Sabbath began.
- Bread could not be put in the oven when darkness was falling on the Sabbath, as it would not be done before the Sabbath began.
- Untying a knot was forbidden if it required both hands.
- A man could not wear nail-studded wooden shoes on the Sabbath because this would be constituted as plowing on the Sabbath.
- A woman could walk around in her own courtyard with false hair, but she could not walk around on the streets with it.
- One could only drink a mouthful of milk on the Sabbath.
- One could drink only the amount of wine to equal the three-eighths of an egg's bulk.
- A schoolmaster could watch his students read, but he could not read.
- Rabbis disagreed whether or not a cripple person whose leg was cut off could go out with his wooden stump.
- Sons of kings could go out with bells on their clothing.

- A scorpion could be covered [or killed] on the Sabbath so it would not bite.
- Jews considered it unlawful to fill a dish with oil and a wick and put it close to a lamp so that one may have light.
- Beds were to be spread prior to the Sabbath for the Sabbath day, but not on the Sabbath for the night following the Sabbath.
- One could not hold enough ink to write two letters as this would constitute a “burden.”
- A person could not put an egg beside a boiling kettle on the Sabbath to cook it.
- Nor could anyone bury the egg in hot sand or in the dust on the road to cook it.
- If a man fell asleep while on a journey and night fell on the Sabbath, he could move in any direction only 2,000 cubits (about .56 mile). (Some adjustments were made to this according to different rabbis.)
- The restriction of 2,000 cubits distance one could go from his house was established for safety’s sake, “to keep one from transgression.” (Staying close to home would keep a man from getting into trouble.)
- If a man was on a journey and Sabbath darkness overtook him, he could establish a familiar tree on the road as his “Sabbath” by stating, “Let my Sabbath resting-place be at the root of this tree” and thus could walk a distance of 2,000 cubits from the root of the tree. The Sabbath limit could be extended farther toward his house up to a distance of 2,000 cubits more. Thus he could travel 4,000 cubits (about 1.1 mile) to his house after dark on the Sabbath.

The Mishnah

Where did these rules come from? *The Mishnah*, which is a recorded compilation of Jewish laws that previously had been passed down orally. Rabbis, deliberating with heated discussion, sought about 220 BC to set the boundaries of interpretation of that law. The result of their work was *the Mishnah*.

The Mishnah has six divisions, which are further divided into tractates. The “Shabbath” (“Sabbath”) is the first of twelve tractates in the second division. “Erubin,” the second of the tractates in the second division, was written to make the oral law related to the Sabbath

more bearable by extending the boundaries. First-century Jews considered the study of the Talmud of first importance, the Mishnah second, and lastly Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament).

Jesus and the Sabbath

No wonder Jesus's Sabbath Day ministry works conflicted with the Pharisees and their devotion to oral law. One Sabbath day Jesus and His disciples traveled through a grain field (Mark 2:23-24). The disciples, who were hungry, picked some heads of grain to eat. The Pharisees, who regarded the disciples' behavior as work, were quick to point out that Jesus's disciples had done something unlawful on the Sabbath.

Jesus responded in two ways. First, He pointed to an Old Testament example where human need took precedence over the law. David and his soldiers, in need of food, entered the tabernacle and ate the bread of the Presence (1 Sam. 21:1-6).

Second, Jesus gave a principle for all Sabbath observances: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. So then, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). Jesus believed God had

instituted the Sabbath for the benefit of people, not for mere adherence to legalistic rules. The lordship of Jesus, not petty regulations, should determine how people observe the Sabbath.

Several times in the Gospel accounts Jesus defended the work He did on the Sabbath (see Mark 3:1-5; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18; 9:1-41). Jesus always placed human need above external observances of Sabbath laws. He emphasized the purposes and the spirit of Sabbath law instead of the external regulations of the oral law.

The article was adapted from the Spring 2006 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**

JOHN 12-21

Session 1 **Why Wasn't This Sold?** • John 12:1-11

Session 2 **If It Dies** • John 12:20-33

Session 3 **I Will Come Again** • John 13:31-14:6

Session 4 **Peace I Leave** • John 14:16-29

Session 5 **Remain in Me** • John 15:1-17

Session 6 **I Have Seen** • John 20:1-18

Session 7 **When the Spirit Comes** • John 15:26-27; 16:7-15

Session 8 **I Pray** • John 17:13-26

Session 9 **I Am He** • John 18:1-11

Session 10 **I Find No Fault** • John 18:28-40

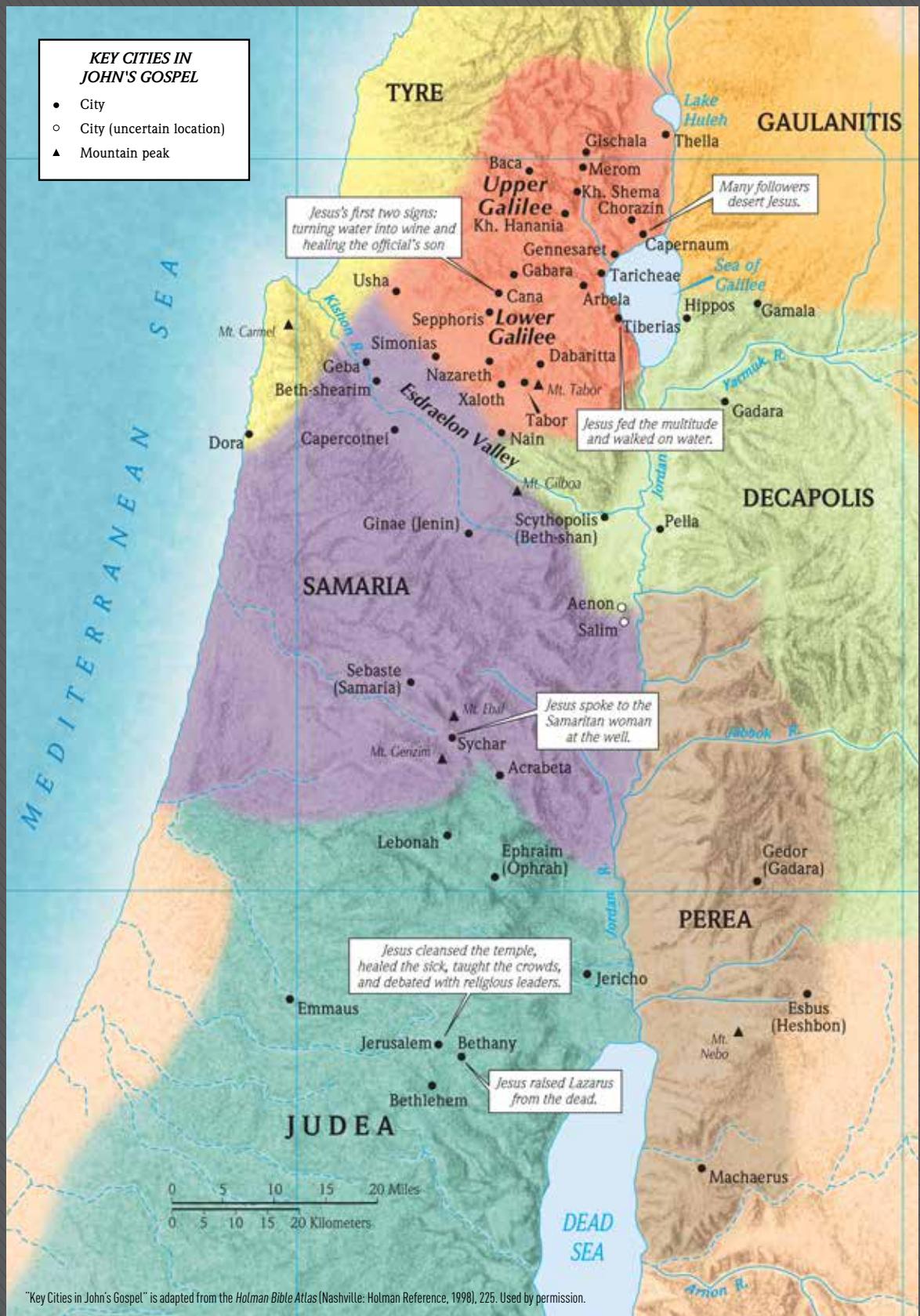
Session 11 **It Is Finished** • John 19:17-30

Session 12 **Reach out Your Hand** • John 20:19-29

Session 13 **Do You Love Me?** • John 21:15-23



Key Cities in John's Gospel



JOHN 1-11

The apostle John was open and honest about why he wrote his Gospel. He longed for people to recognize Jesus as God's Son and to find eternal life in His name. Every miraculous sign and every powerful sermon point to Christ's role as Messiah and emphasize His offer of abundant life. That's why, even today, readers continue to connect deeply with John's Gospel—and with the Savior his Gospel reveals.

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