



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

THAT YOU
MAY BELIEVE

STUDY GUIDE
PART ONE

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

That You May Believe

A STUDY GUIDE
(Part 1)



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SUMMIT-CHRISTIAN.ORG

WELCOME!

Summit Christian Family,

Welcome to our study guide on the Gospel of John!

This material was written, prayed over, and assembled by your brothers and sisters at Summit Christian Fellowship. Our desire is to help us all go deeper into the content of John's Gospel, facilitate meaningful conversation and study in our community groups, and prepare our hearts for our Sunday gatherings.

As you work through these pages, we pray that the Holy Spirit meets you, overwhelming you with the wonder of Christ's person and work. We are excited for you to join us in the study of this incredible Gospel account, and for our church to be reminded again of the simple, beautiful realities of what it means to believe that Jesus is the Christ.

Come, join with us in knowing and making known the real Jesus through this study of John.

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Each week, we invite you to join us by immersing your mind, encouraging your heart, and engaging your will with the teaching of John's Gospel. To help us all do this, together, we have provided a variety of avenues for you to pursue. However, the questions and readings given each week are not designed to be completed in one sitting. Instead, their purpose is to help you to meditate on our text throughout the entire week, preparing your heart for our Sunday together.

First, each week you'll find a **DEVOTIONAL** written by one of the members of Summit Christian Fellowship. These readings focus on one theme from the text, diving deeper into it in order to unpack the rich nuance of what John has given us in the text.

Next, you'll find a series of questions and prompts that follow the **REAP** pattern. (We often use this pattern in our Summit Community Group studies, and many of you might be using it in your daily Bible journaling.)

- This pattern begins by encouraging you to **READ** through the text, noticing the structure, themes, and context of the passage.
- Next, we'll **EXAMINE** the passage together, investigating key terms, exploring *why* the author is saying what he said to his original readers, and seeing how the light of the Gospel shines on each passage.
- The third step is where the rubber meets the road: application. Under the **APPLY** section, you'll find questions designed to help you think through the "so what?" of each text. You might be tempted to rush through this part of the study guide, but we encourage you: do the opposite! Slow down in this section. Work through it, thoughtfully and prayerfully, asking the Holy

Spirit to show you the rich significance of these truths for your daily life.

- The final section in our REAP pattern is an invitation to **PRAY**. Some of our contributors have written a prayer for you to pray along with them. Others have given you prayer prompts to follow. All of these are simply designed to help you. Our driving desire is that this material encourages us all to live lives that flow out of a deepening relationship with our God. And prayer is an essential part of that.

Lastly, we've included a section of lined pages for **SERMON NOTES** on the passage when it is preached on Sunday. Our goal is to put all of this content in one place so that not only will you feel immersed in the Gospel of John during this season, you'll be able to come back to these pages again and again for reference and renewal.

May God bless you in your study!

INTRODUCING JOHN'S GOSPEL

"The Gospel of John is shallow enough for a child to wade in, and yet deep enough for an elephant to drown."

- credited to St. Augustine

God, in his providence, has seen fit to give us four accounts of the life of Jesus. Each presents the glory of the Son of God from a different angle, highlighting different facets of his person and work. Yet among the four Gospels, there is none quite as unique as the Gospel of John.

John introduces us to the wonder of the Word made flesh - the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, incarnate in human history. Jesus is the fullness of God in human form - come to reveal the Father and to seek and save the lost. John invites us not just to observe Jesus, but believe in him - and through that belief, to receive true, eternal, abundant life.

Our prayer is that John would reintroduce you to the real Jesus. That you would see his glory. And that, in seeing, you would truly believe.

AUTHOR & DATE:

John the Apostle was "the disciple Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 20:2) and, along with Peter and James, was one of Jesus' closest friends. While John never names himself directly in this Gospel, both the testimony of the early church and the internal evidence of the book itself point clearly to John, the son of Zebedee, as its author. The Gospel is written from the perspective of an eyewitness—someone who walked closely with Jesus, belonged to his inner circle, and bore personal witness to what he saw and heard.

Most scholars date the Gospel of John to the later years of the first century, likely written sometime between AD 70 and 100. By this point, the other three Gospels were already circulating, and John

writes with a clear awareness of them. Rather than retelling the same events, John reflects deeply on their meaning, offering what the early church described as a more “spiritual” Gospel—not less historical, but more reflective, drawing out the significance of who Jesus is and why he came.

AUDIENCE & OCCASION:

John wrote his Gospel near the close of the first century to a broad audience of both Jews and Gentiles living in the Greco-Roman world. He grounds his account deeply in the Old Testament and presents Jesus as Israel’s promised Messiah. Writing from Ephesus, a major cultural and intellectual center, John addresses a world shaped by competing ideas about truth, meaning, and God—and presents Jesus as the true Word made flesh who reveals the Father.

John states his purpose clearly in 20:30-31: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” His goal is not only that readers would come to faith, but that their belief would deepen into a settled, life-giving trust. Through selected signs and faithful witnesses, John points us again and again to Jesus himself—the one in whom true life is found.

STYLE & THEMES

John’s Gospel is written as a carefully crafted theological narrative. It tells the story of what Jesus did and said, and how people responded to him—but always with a clear purpose in view. John frequently slows the story down, pairing Jesus’ actions with extended conversations and teaching that draw out their deeper meaning. Throughout the Gospel, John uses rich symbolism—light and darkness, bread and water, life and death—to help us see not just what Jesus does, but who he is.

A distinctive feature of John’s style is his use of “signs.” These are not merely miracles, but revealed works meant to point beyond themselves to Jesus’ identity as the Messiah and Son of God. Often,

a sign is followed by dialogue or discourse that presses the reader toward belief. John also makes frequent use of contrast and misunderstanding, where Jesus' words are initially taken at face value before their true, spiritual meaning is revealed. The result is a Gospel that invites slow reading, deep reflection, and personal response—calling us again and again to believe and to live.

Key Themes:

1. Jesus as the Word, Lamb of God, and Messianic Son

John 1:1–14, 29; 1:49; 20:30–31

2. Signs that reveal Jesus' identity

John 2:1–11; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–21; 9:1–7; 11:1–44

3. The New Covenant Community

John 1:11–13; 4:21–24; 5:16–18; 9:22; 13:34–35

4. Eschatology and New Creation

John 1:1–5; 5:24–29; 11:25–26

5. God the Father revealed through the Son

John 1:18; 5:19–23; 14:8–11; 17:1–5

6. The Holy Spirit (the Helper)

John 7:37–39; 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15; 20:21–22

7. Salvation and Substitutionary Atonement

John 1:29; 3:14–16; 10:11–18; 12:24; 19:30

8. Realized Eschatology — Eternal Life Now

John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:10; 17:3

NOT THE POINT: JOHN 1:19-34

Ryan Knight

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness..."

- John 1:23

DEVOTIONAL:

Imagine living in a world where most roads were little more than rough dirt trails. That was most of the ancient world. Outside of major cities in the Roman Empire, travel was slow, uneven, and often dangerous. But when a king or governor planned to visit a region, he didn't simply show up unannounced. He sent people ahead of him. "Road preparers," you might call them. Their job was to clear obstacles, level rough ground, and make the way ready for the one who was coming. It wasn't glamorous work. In fact, if they did their job well, most people wouldn't notice them. The road crew existed for one reason: to make sure the king could be seen and received.

That image sits just beneath the opening scene of John's Gospel. After the soaring prologue of John 1:1-18, we are introduced to John the Baptist, a man whose entire life was shaped by that kind of "road preparer" calling.

In John 1:19, priests and Levites arrive from Jerusalem to investigate John and his ministry. His preaching had drawn crowds. His baptism ministry had people talking. So they ask him a simple, direct question:

"Who are you?"

It's a question that sounds straightforward, but it's anything but neutral. They aren't just asking for a name, they're asking for authority, identity, and significance. And it's the same kind of question many of us learn to answer, whether we realize it or not. Who are you really? What defines you? What makes your life meaningful?

If anyone could have answered confidently, it was John. An angel had announced his birth. The prophets had foretold his mission. People traveled great distances to hear him preach. And yet, before John tells them who he is, he is careful to say to them who he is *not*.

"I am not the Christ."

"I am not Elijah."

"I am not the Prophet."

John refuses every identity that would make him the center of the story. Instead, he reaches back to Isaiah and gives them the simple truth:

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" (v. 23)

In other words, "I'm road crew. I'm here to prepare the way so the true King can be seen." John knows exactly who he is, and who he isn't. But the surprising part of this passage is how John came to that clarity.

A few verses later, John says something that should make us pause:

"I myself did not know him..." (v. 31)

Think about that for a second. John and Jesus were related. Their family stories were intertwined. John's entire life had been oriented toward the coming Messiah. And yet, John says he did not fully recognize Jesus until God revealed Him.

John's identity didn't come from self-discovery. It wasn't the product of deep introspection or personal insight. He didn't figure out who he was by looking inward. He only understood who he was once he understood who Jesus was.

As the Spirit descends and remains on Jesus at His baptism, it's clear that everything is clicking into place for John. And that revelation leads John to his climactic confession:

"I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (v. 34)

That word, "*witness*," is the key to the entire passage.

John is someone who sees. Someone who testifies. Someone whose purpose is not to be the point, but to point beyond himself. He is the herald, not the Word. The lamp, not the Light. The road preparer, not the King. And this is where the passage presses into our own lives.

Many of us carry real anxiety around the same question John the Baptist was asked:

Who are you? What makes your life matter? How do you find purpose that lasts?

We often look inward for answers, examining our strengths, achievements, personality, or aspirations. Or maybe we look outward, validating our existence and purpose based on the praise and recognition of others. But John's life gently confronts these instincts. He shows us that identity does not begin with self-revelation, but with God's revelation of His Son.

The clearer Jesus becomes - the Lamb who takes away sin, the Son of God on whom the Spirit remains - the clearer our own calling becomes. We are not the center of the story; we are witnesses. Signposts. People whose lives exist to redirect attention toward Someone greater.

And here's the surprising gift: John's life wasn't diminished because he wasn't the point. It was made more meaningful because he knew what his life was for and whose story he was part of.

The same is true for us. We don't need to be the hero. We don't need to build a name for ourselves. We are invited into something far

better, the joyful work of preparing the way, bearing witness that
"This is the Son of God."

What a gift to be part of the road crew for the King.

REAP: READ, EXAMINE, APPLY, PRAY

Take some time to work through the REAP pattern as you approach this week's text. These questions are not designed to be completed in one sitting. Their purpose is to help you to meditate on the text throughout the week, preparing your heart for your Community Group discussion and the preaching of the Word on Sunday morning.

Read:

- Notice how many times John the Baptist is asked about who he is in this passage. What specific identities does he deny?
- What titles or descriptions of Jesus appear in verses 29–34? Which one stands out to you most?
- Pay attention to repetition. What words or ideas does John emphasize as he speaks about Jesus?
- Where do you see the language of seeing, knowing, or bearing witness in this passage?

Examine:

- Why do you think John begins by clarifying who he is *not* before describing his role?
- What does John mean when he says, “I myself did not know him” (v. 31)? What does this teach us about how Jesus is revealed?
- What is the significance of the Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus? How does this shape our understanding of who Jesus is?
- Why is it important that John identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (v. 29) before anything else?

Apply:

- Where do you feel pressure, internally or externally, to define yourself by your role, calling, or visibility?
- In what ways do you resonate more with wanting to be *noticed* than wanting to be *faithful*?
- Who has God used in your life as a “witness”—someone who helped you see Jesus more clearly?
- What might it look like, practically, for you to “point away from yourself” toward Jesus this week?
- How would your relationships, work, or service change if your primary calling were simply to bear faithful witness?

Pray:

- Thank God for revealing His Son and making Himself known to this world through him..
- Confess ways you have sought identity or meaning apart from Christ.
- Ask the Spirit to help you see Jesus more clearly and to shape your life as a faithful witness.
- Pray that our church would be marked by humility, clarity, and joy as we point others to Jesus.

TRANSFORMED BY CHRIST: JOHN 1:35-51

David Swindler

"What are you seeking?"

- John 1:38

DEVOTIONAL:

In John 1, two of John the Baptist's disciples begin to follow Jesus. The question Jesus asks them is simple yet provocative: "What are you seeking?" (v. 38). It's a question that gets under the surface to their heart motivations. And it's a question we need to sit with as well. What are we seeking as we follow Jesus?

Many of us have fixed routines we follow in our Christian life – church, Scripture reading, prayer, community. These are good gifts. But even good routines can become rote. It is often easier to check a box on our to-do list than to pause and evaluate our motives. But Jesus' question presses us to do just that. What are we actually seeking as we follow Him? What is the aim of our lives? Are our spiritual practices shaping us in the right direction, or have they become simply tasks to get done? If you were asked "what are you seeking?", how should you respond?

When Jesus asks this question of his disciples, they respond with a question of their own, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" (v. 38). At first glance, it can seem like they are dodging Jesus' question. He asks about purpose; they ask about location. But their question actually reveals their answer. By calling him, "Rabbi", the disciples are expressing a desire to learn from Jesus. And by asking where he's staying, they hint that they want more than just a passing conversation; they want time with him. They want to be where Jesus is.

One of these disciples, Andrew, became Jesus' first disciple and remained with him throughout his earthly ministry. Andrew is so impacted by his time spent with Jesus, that immediately he goes and

finds his brother, Simon Peter, declaring “We have found the Messiah” (v. 41). Andrew doesn’t yet have a fully formed theology or polished answer to Jesus’ question, but he’s encountered someone life-changing and wants more. And not just for himself, but for those he cares about.

Interestingly, there is another of John the Baptist’s disciples who heard his question, though he remains unnamed. The story doesn’t tell us what became of him. It is presumed he heard Jesus out, then left. This unnamed disciple was seeking a lesson, rather than a restructuring of his entire life. It raises a question for us: is it possible to encounter Jesus and then simply move on? To seek insight without transformation?

I see this in my own devotional life. I sit down for quiet time with the Lord and fall into the same pattern as the unnamed disciple. I get a quick truth, say a basic prayer, and go on unchanged. I don’t come to these spiritual habits to intentionally be transformed. Yet I am encouraged by the example of Andrew and Peter. For them, learning from Jesus is not a mind-numbing religious exercise, but a joy that renews their lives. They listen and allow their lives to be transformed.

Maybe the desire to be where Jesus is, is the reason behind your religious practices. Or maybe you haven’t felt that joy in a long time. There is no promise that devotions will always feel easy, or emotionally rich, or that you won’t be distracted during your prayer time. But as the disciples sat under Jesus’ teaching, listening intently, they became more and more convinced that this Jesus was worth following. Their faith and desire flourished.

So, the question for us is not only whether we are following Jesus, but what are we seeking as we do? Are the practices of Scripture, prayer, and community pathways for transformation, or just habits we maintain? Jesus’ invitation is not “check this off,” but “come and see.” If your faith has felt mechanical or distant, that may not mean

you need new habits, but a renewed purpose for why you do them. Linger where Jesus is, as the disciples did. Failing, learning, growing, but always choosing to look and listen to the teaching of their Rabbi. We enter into these practices for the purpose of growth. He who called us is faithful to change us, as we sit under his teaching.

REAP: READ, EXAMINE, APPLY, PRAY

Take some time to work through the REAP pattern as you approach this week's text. These questions are not designed to be completed in one sitting. Their purpose is to help you to meditate on the text throughout the week, preparing your heart for your Community Group discussion and the preaching of the Word on Sunday morning.

Read:

- Read John 1:19-51 paying attention to how John, Andrew, and Phillip react when encountering Jesus
- What causes Nathaniel to believe?
- When the disciples call Jesus, "The Messiah" and "The King of Israel", what do they mean?

Examine:

- What are the proofs in Chapter 1 that Jesus is the Messiah?
- What does Jesus mean when saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (v. 51)?
- Is Jesus just a teacher to his disciples?

Apply:

- Reflect on this passage in light of your own time with Jesus. Are you simply trying to get through it to check a box, or do you linger with Him? What do rhythms of lingering look like in your life?
- Do you respond the way Andrew does to Jesus in verses 40-42? How, or why not?
- Is your faith rooted in completing tasks for God, or in fixing your gaze on the accomplished work of God?

Pray:

- Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal what you are truly seeking.
- Thank God for revealing Jesus to us—not just as a teacher, but as the Son of God and Savior.
- Pray for simple courage to invite others to Jesus, trusting him to do the work.

FROM MUNDANE TO MARVELOUS: JOHN 2:1-12

Matt Voss

"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

- John 2:11

DEVOTIONAL:

There's nothing a kid hates doing more than chores. Growing up in my home, my parents had us help out around the house with various chores and responsibilities. I hated taking out the trash, doing the dishes, or vacuuming the carpet. I did my chores because I knew that if I didn't, I would get in trouble and I wouldn't get to do what I wanted to do. As a result, I just went through the motions. Chores became a mundane activity robbed of all joy. I did them because I had to.

Life is full of all kinds of things that cause us to go through the motions. We all on some level experience the mundaneness of life - times with no sense of joy or excitement. Where does this come from? Well, the problem cuts much deeper than sweeping floors and shaking rugs. Each of us naturally defaults to a kind of works-based righteousness. We think to be in right standing before God (righteousness) we need to do good things (works) that he asks us to do: Bible studies, devotions, praying, going to church. Our thought is: "If I do these things, then God will love me and bless me."

But if this is our mentality, walking with Christ will feel like a chore. No wonder we are robbed of joy. We are go through the motions, doing "the right thing", and it makes us miserable. This is essentially empty religion: following a set of rules in order to avoid punishment or receive some reward. But when Jesus arrives on the scene, he flips the whole paradigm of 'religion' on its head. The mundane is made marvelous through the free grace of Jesus.

In John 2, Jesus is at a wedding in Cana when all the wine runs out. In the first century, running out of wine at a wedding would have

brought incredible shame to the hosts. Jesus is asked to solve the problem. We are told, “there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification” (v. 6). These water jars were used in Jewish culture to perform various hand washing rituals. Washing your hands in specific ways would make you ceremonially clean before God. Jesus ordered that the jars be filled with water. As the water is brought out to the wedding guests, they discover that it is actually the best wine they’ve ever tasted. The wedding is saved. Jesus, by sheer grace, miraculously transformed the water into wine.

Jesus performed this miracle among those entrenched in a works-based righteousness. They thought if they performed these washing rituals (and many other laws), they would secure God’s blessing. It was a works-based system: follow the rules, and God will reward you. But Jesus took what a symbol of cold, dead works-based righteousness and transformed it into a vessel for joy and celebration. The mundane is made marvelous through the grace of Jesus.

In verse 12, John summarizes the point of this entire event: “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory” (v. 11). In turning water into wine, Jesus reveals his glory - who he is and what he’s really about. Jesus comes to transform man-made, mundane, works-based religion into a joy-filled relationship with God, given entirely by grace. In his life, Jesus was perfectly obedient to the Father in all the ways we never could be. In his death, Jesus paid the price our sin required. By simply believing in him as his disciples did, God sees us the way he sees Jesus: righteous. No longer do we need to earn God’s approval. Jesus has already done that.

Whether we are sweeping floors or shaking rugs, this news helps us approach every moment with the joy we so desperately need. The mundane can be made marvelous through the grace of Jesus.

REAP: READ, EXAMINE, APPLY, PRAY

Take some time to work through the REAP pattern as you approach this week's text. These questions are not designed to be completed in one sitting. Their purpose is to help you to meditate on the text throughout the week, preparing your heart for your Community Group discussion and the preaching of the Word on Sunday morning.

Read:

- Read the passage in its totality (John 2:1-12). As you read, identify the elements of the story (setting, plot, resolution, main characters, etc.).
- Imagine yourself present at the wedding. How would you feel when the wine runs out? How would you feel when Jesus miraculously makes more wine?

Examine:

- Read John 2:1. Why is it significant that Jesus is at a wedding? Where else in the Bible are weddings talked about?
- Read verses 9-11. Why is it significant that the wine is miraculously provided by Jesus and not some other means?
- According to verse 11, what is the ultimate purpose of this sign?

Apply:

- Identify some areas in your life where you are going through the motions. What are some places in your regular rhythms that feel mundane and boring?
- How are you trusting in your own righteousness to merit the blessing of God? Consider where you may be saying, "But God, I've done ____ for you, so you owe me ____."
- Ask God to help you to have joy in the midst of the mundane.

Pray:

Father, thank you for giving us your Son, Jesus. Thank you for no longer needing to try to earn your love and approval. Forgive us for thinking we can earn what you freely give. Help us to turn away from the ways we try to earn your love. Would we know and experience the joy that your Son came to bring us. By the power of your Spirit, bring us the kind of joy that is deep-rooted and remains regardless of where you take us. Father, would the joy we have in Christ be so contagious that others can see and find the joy in Christ as well. Thank you for everything you do. We pray all this in Jesus name, Amen.

A FULLER PICTURE OF JESUS: JOHN 2:13-25

Marcus Peterson

"And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables."

- John 2:15

DEVOTIONAL:

Jim Carrey's success as a stand-up comedian in the 1980s led to his casting on the sketch comedy show, *In Living Color*, and in major box office films such as *Ace Ventura* and *Dumb and Dumber*. His roles often accentuated his ability to contort his body in ways that few others could. So, it came as a surprise to everyone when, in 1998, Carrey starred as Truman Burbank in the box office drama *The Truman Show*.

Upon the film's release, acclaimed film critic Roger Ebert remarked, "Carrey is a surprisingly good choice to play Truman. We catch glimpses of his manic comic persona, just to make us comfortable with his presence in the character, but this is a well-planned performance."

Audiences' perceptions of Jim Carrey expanded when they saw him in a new role. They were able to see a fuller picture of who he was as a performer because of his transition to a new genre. The fun-loving, physically comical Jim Carrey still shone through, but in different ways.

Similarly, John 2 offers us a fuller picture of who Jesus is and what he came to earth to do. Instead of the traditional, gentle Jesus we often envision him to be, we see a righteously angry Jesus. It is a fuller picture of the character and nature of the Son of God.

Our initial reaction to this fuller picture of Jesus might be, "Why? Why does John depict the quiet, humble Jesus of verses 1-12 as a loud, angry interrupter in verses 13-22? Why does Jesus drive out

the animals and money-changers? Why does he use a whip and flip over tables? It's all a bit dramatic."

The striking contrast to the Jesus we see in the first half of the chapter is no accident. John uses this scene to introduce us to Christ's authority. John wants his readers to understand and believe that Jesus is the Son of God and, therefore, he has authority over God's house. The first-century audience would have been intimately familiar with the major theme of the Old Testament captured in Exodus 34:6-7:

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

The God of the Old Testament, who revealed himself to Moses, is slow to anger. But this does not mean that he is *without* anger. Rather than recline passively in the sky, the Creator steps into his creation to address its disobedience. John asserts that the Son of God, because of his equality with God, is not passive when it comes to addressing sin either. The money-changers were taking advantage of the Passover (the pinnacle of Jewish holidays) to make a profit from people who wanted to offer sacrifices. They were guilty of worshiping money over God, *on the holy ground of God's temple*. Jesus, the Son of God, had every right to drive them away from his Father's house.

John wants us to know that Jesus has authority over all things, including the temple itself. This should remain on our minds as we follow John's story. Jesus could, at any time, demand the worship he deserves from every person he crosses paths with. Instead, he heals people and offers to be a shepherd. This is the Son of God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. However, John also emphasizes that to focus only on the merciful Christ is to have an unbalanced view of him. We must not

forget that Jesus “will by no means clear the guilty” while he is also “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”

What box do you try to put Jesus into? Do you avoid certain Bible passages in order to remain comfortable with the idea of a non-judgmental, merciful, and gracious Jesus? At some level, we all do this. We want the “good” parts of Jesus because it makes us feel deserving of his love. But we do not deserve the love of Jesus. We deserve to be driven out of the temple for idolizing God’s creation above God himself. If we don’t understand the depth of our own unworthiness, we will miss something of the breadth of the *real* Jesus and the significance of what he has done for us.

In this scene at the temple, Jesus wrathfully uses a whip to prevent sinful money from being exchanged. At the end of his life, sinful money is exchanged in return for his capture (18:3). A whip is used on Jesus rather than by him (19:1). The wrath of God is poured out on Jesus rather than us (19:28-30). That is mercy: not getting what we deserve. But on top of mercy, we get grace - what we don’t deserve: the same relationship with God that the Son of God has.

If you receive the grace of Jesus, you won’t be driven out of the place of God’s presence. Instead, he invites you in. His anger is no longer directed towards you; he wants you to believe that he can save you from your own unrighteousness. Be encouraged that he wants you to know all parts of him deeply.

Some film watchers missed out on *The Truman Show* when they assumed Jim Carrey couldn’t star in a non-comedic production. Don’t miss out on Jesus because you avoid parts of him that you don’t think fit with the rest of who he is. John 2 shows us that every part of Jesus is worthy of our belief.

REAP: READ, EXAMINE, APPLY, PRAY

Take some time to work through the REAP pattern as you approach this week's text. These questions are not designed to be completed in one sitting. Their purpose is to help you to meditate on the text throughout the week, preparing your heart for your Community Group discussion and the preaching of the Word on Sunday morning.

Read:

- What Jewish holiday did Jesus and his disciples travel to Jerusalem for? What other significant events happen surrounding this holiday later in the book?
- Take note of each time John mentions the disciples. What do the disciples do throughout the chapter?
- Who are "the Jews" in verses 18-20? Has Jesus had any interactions with them so far in John's gospel?

Examine:

- Why would Jesus drive out animals that could be used for sacrifices? What would people who traveled long distances do if they could not buy an animal to be sacrificed?
- The purpose for John's gospel is found in John 20:30-31. Where do we see that referenced in this passage? What is John's hope as he consistently references this theme?
- Why would Jesus reference his resurrection when he knew they wouldn't understand what he was referring to?

Apply:

- Define the word “zealous.” Are you zealous for God the way Jesus was? Identify a time in your life that the Spirit has prompted zealousness for God in you.
- What are ways that you reduce the character or nature of Jesus? Perhaps it’s by ignoring scenes such as his righteous anger we find in John 2. Or, it’s by downplaying his gentleness and grace. Confess an area in your life that you adapt Jesus to what you want him to be for you.
- Are there ways that the modern American church has commercialized religion? How can we be aware of ways we might fall into the same pattern as the first-century Jews?

Pray:

- Pray for slowness to anger.
- Pray that in situations where righteous anger is inevitably required, God would be glorified through the conquering of sin.
- Pray for a fuller understanding of who Jesus is. Pray that we would not reduce Jesus to who we want him to be.
- Pray for those that are blind to the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. Specifically pray for those that use God’s house as a means by which to personally profit.

LIVING IN THE LIGHT: JOHN 3:1-21

Joyce Jones

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

- John 3:19-21

DEVOTIONAL:

During the months when COVID closed schools, I depended on videos, Zoom classes, and Google Classroom to "teach" my students, assign homework, and collect assignments. One Saturday morning, while I was outside in the surprisingly harsh winter sunlight (looking for birds), I realized I'd failed to give students their assignment the day before. It occurred to me that, instead of waiting until I got home to post the message, I could record the announcement in the bright outdoors and post it from my phone. A change of background scenery would be nice.

After I got home, I checked that the announcement had posted. I watched the video of myself walking along that sunny trail, however, with mild dismay. Who was that person in the video? She looked so old! The relatively dim lights in my house might have allowed me to believe I was drinking from the fountain of youth, but the brutally honest sunshine did no such thing. The light had not-so-kindly exposed a truth I had, up to then, avoided: I was getting old.

Light does that; it exposes truth. Truth is critically important if we are going to walk free from deception. Jesus, who declared himself to be both truth and light, calls us out of darkness and into his glorious light, in order that we see truth (1 Peter 2:9). Hallelujah! But not everyone appreciates or wants that light. In fact, some people hate it.

In the passage above, Jesus states, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:19-20).

Outside of Christ, we hate, and will not come to, the light. But, are non-Christians the only ones who ever resist coming to the light? Or, can sincere believers also, inadvertently, or intentionally, avoid the light that will expose their hearts? Can a true Christian choose to slink about in matters of darkness lest his works should be exposed? This is the question I've returned to many times as I've read these verses. Because, I don't think that we who follow Christ always love the light as we should. I think it's possible for a Christian to resist that light as well.

As the Apostle John often does, he presents the principle of light and darkness as a dichotomy. In this passage, someone either hates the light or comes to the light. But, the Apostle Paul, in urging the Ephesians to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11), implies that it's possible for believers to humor the darkness. Romans 13:12-14 urges us to put aside deeds of darkness and to put on the armor of light. The implication is that we can come to the light of salvation but shy away from the full brilliance of its truth. Or, perhaps more commonly, we try to manage that light, ourselves, so we can control where it is allowed to shine and what it illuminates.

Why would a Christian avoid, seek to control, or fail to come to the light? I can think of at least three reasons. One reason might be ignorance about just how this light works. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Notice where that light is aimed; Christ shines it into our hearts. Many believers, focused on their external spirituality, don't even realize they need God to address their hearts.

I spent years stumbling about with a deep sense of inadequacy and poor self-esteem that constantly simmered under the surface. It never occurred to me to ask God to free me from it; I just kept pushing it back into the dark. I didn't open my heart to the light partly because I didn't know I needed to.

A second reason a believer might not come to the light is that they don't want to. Light exposes truth, and truth is not always flattering. It can deal a heavy indictment. Light exposes selfishness, sins we've been holding onto, wrong motives . . . all sorts of secrets lurking in the dark. And though it creates great dissonance and unrest to do so, we can prize sin or self-interest more than the light. Since sin is a continual reality in our earthly lives, coming to the light daily should be our practice. Any hesitation we feel about coming to the light should serve as a red flag.

A third reason Christians might not come to the light is that we have become complacent. We've got the Christian life figured out. Life is humming along; why invite complications? This dangerous, yet common, mindset sets the believer up for havoc. 1 Peter 4:7 and 5:8 warn us against complacency; it is the state that makes us most vulnerable to Satan's destructive ways.

The light is such a gift! But, practically speaking, how do we come into that light? We access that light through the Scriptures (Psalm 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19-20; Proverbs 6:23). We come to the light when we place ourselves before our open Bible, day after day, and invite the Spirit to shine truth into every dark corner of our hearts. Then we wait expectantly, throughout each day, as God might bring Scripture to mind and illuminate truth when we least expect it. Light shines when we remove all caveats, limitations and barriers to God's truth.

Sadly, even as Christians we can avoid, manipulate, disregard or be ignorant of Christ's light. But how amazing, how freeing, how transformational is that light! Here is a test: are you willing to throw open your heart, sit before the Word, and invite the Spirit of God to

illuminate any darkness in your heart - and then wait for him to do so?

Oh, glorious light that saves us from being deceived!

REAP: READ, EXAMINE, APPLY, PRAY

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Read:

- Read John 3:1-21 and take notice of any repeated words, phrases, or themes.
- Imagine being Nicodemus. What statements from Jesus would feel surprising, uncomfortable, or hard to understand? What claims does Jesus make about himself that go beyond what Nicodemus expects?
- How does the tone of the passage shift from the beginning (vv. 1-10) to the end (vv. 16-21)?

Examine:

- Who is Nicodemus, and why is it significant that he comes to Jesus "by night"?
- How does Jesus describe the difference between physical birth and spiritual birth?
- What role does the Spirit play in new birth according to Jesus?
- According to verses 19-21, why do people ultimately reject the light?

Apply:

- Nicodemus is religious, respected, and sincere—yet Jesus says he still needs new birth. What does this challenge about how we tend to think about spiritual maturity?
- Jesus says new life is something we *receive*, not something we achieve. Where are you tempted to rely on effort, knowledge, or morality instead of grace?
- John 3:16 is a familiar verse, but in context it flows out of a conversation about rebirth. How does that shape your understanding of what it means to “believe” in Jesus?
- Jesus says people avoid the light because they don’t want their works exposed. Are there areas of your life you tend to keep in the dark? Why?
- What would it look like for you this week to “come into the light” in a concrete way?

Pray:

Oh, bright light of the world. Thank you for delivering us from darkness and giving us light. We welcome your illuminating, exposing, truth-telling light to continually shine in our hearts. We release our control of that light and invite you to shine it where you want it to go. Thank you that the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). Please continue to shine your light of truth into our hearts, and help us to love that light even when it shows us what we’d rather not see.

THE JOY OF CHRIST-CENTERED HUMILITY: JOHN 3:22-36

Carson Haskell

"Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

He must increase, but I must decrease."

- John 3:29-30

DEVOTIONAL:

"Never wear a white dress to a wedding." Hearing this as a child perplexed me. I didn't personally have any issues with the color white, but apparently everyone else did—especially when it came to weddings! Well, imagine my bewilderment when I saw the bride walking down the aisle in the most extravagant white dress I had ever seen! Didn't anyone tell her: *never wear a white dress to a wedding*? Eventually, I was let in on the secret: you never wear a white dress to a wedding because you don't want to distract from the bride, the one for whom the wedding exists. The day belongs to her and her groom. Everyone else is merely a witness, beholding and delighting in the beauty of a marriage.

Now, imagine deliberately showing up to someone else's wedding in a dazzling white dress. Who would have the gall to do such a thing? Nobody could be *that* hopelessly self-centered, right? Well, in a way, that is what you and I do *every* single day of our lives. No, I'm not talking about dresses and weddings —I'm talking about the natural bent of the human heart. Our desperate and subtle attempts to make life all about *ourselves*. We step into the grand narrative of God's story and act like *we're* at the very center of it. It is astonishing how many of our day-to-day problems stem from simply *thinking about ourselves too much*. Maybe you've felt it too, but there is a kind of weariness that comes from carrying yourself at the center of everything. The self is an exhausting god to serve.

In this passage, John the Baptist offers an antidote to our self-inflicted, self-centered misery. One that, as C.S. Lewis observes,

“is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert.”¹ It is the way of humility. The way of Christ-exalting, self-forgetfulness.

Consider the significance of John the Baptist. Jesus Himself said about John, “among those born of woman there has arisen no one greater” (Matt. 11:11). After four centuries of prophetic silence, John steps onto the stage as God’s chosen herald. He is Isaiah’s promised forerunner to the Messiah, “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness” (Jn. 1:23; Isa. 40:3). He stands at the hinge of redemptive history, announcing that the long night of waiting is finally over. Clearly, John is an extraordinarily unique figure in God’s plan of salvation. And yet, for all his greatness, what truly sets John apart is his *humility*.

Here he is at the height of his ministry. People from all over Judea and Jerusalem are coming to hear him preach and be baptized by him (Mark 1:5). He’s amassed crowds and dedicated followers—a whole movement is beginning to form around him. All eyes are on John; that is, until Jesus steps into the public sphere, and everyone suddenly begins flocking to *him*. John is now at risk of fading into obscurity, which is precisely what his disciples are worried about. “Look, [Jesus] is baptizing, and *all are going to him*” (Jn. 3:26). They think that Jesus is stealing the spotlight. But John knows better: “I am not the Christ ... the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:28-30). In other words, “*this isn’t my wedding. It’s not about me.*” And then, in one brilliant statement, John beautifully goes against the inclination of every human heart: “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*”

This is not a sigh of resignation; it is a song of celebration. John knows he is not the point; he is merely *the pointer to the point*. The

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), Book III, chap. 8, “The Great Sin.”

whole aim of his life and ministry is not to grow his own reputation or build a personal platform, but to point others to Christ, the only one who truly belongs at the center, the one for whom all things exist. Of course, John had a unique role in redemptive history. But the aim of his life was the same as it should be for every believer: to *make Jesus known*. To live with the kind of radical humility that says “I must decrease,” in order to display Christ all the more clearly.

But, here is the good news: the path of humility and self-forgetfulness is not one of joyless misery; it is, on the contrary, one of ever-increasing life, joy, and peace. It is the road to flourishing. Quite remarkably, what it means to be truly human is to live not for yourself but for the glory of God. Jesus says, “whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24) and “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn. 10:10). In other words, the call to self-forgetfulness, to self-denial, is actually an invitation to become truly human again. This is why John’s response is not defeat, insecurity, jealousy, or anxiety; no, it is complete and perfect *joy* (Jn. 3:29).

“How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it,”² writes G.K. Chesterton. The smaller you become in light of the incomprehensibly glorious Christ, the larger your life becomes. You were made to behold *Him*—to lose yourself in the glory, wonder, and beauty of your Creator. And so the deflation of self is simultaneously an inflation of joy. Let us, then, follow in John’s footsteps. May our hearts cry out with his, “*I must decrease, but he must increase*,” that we might experience the surpassing joy of Christ-centered humility.

² G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: John Lane, 1908), chap. 2, “The Maniac.”

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Reap:

- Read verses 22-24. Notice how these verses frame the relationship between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry.
- Read verses 25-26. What are John's disciples concerned about?
- As you read the rest of the passage, pay attention to the different ways John talks about himself vs. Jesus.
- Read verses 16-21 and 31-36, noticing the similarities. What do these passages reveal about the author's intent, as well as the person of Christ?

Examine:

- What is the significance of John's response in verse 27? How does it address his disciple's concern?
- What is John trying to convey in the wedding metaphor? Why does he conclude with, "therefore, this joy of mine is now complete"?
- John says that Christ *must* increase and, conversely, he *must* decrease. Why is this a necessity?
- Verses 31-36 serve as a commentary on the preceding historical narrative. What does John (the author) reveal about the differences between the roles and authority of John the Baptist and Jesus?

Apply:

- Where do you most instinctively look for joy, validation, or significance apart from Christ?
- When do you feel most threatened, overlooked, or insecure? What does that reveal about where you want to “increase”?
- What does “I must decrease” look like in your ordinary routines this week (work, parenting, friendships, church)?
- How does John’s joy challenge your assumptions about where true fulfillment comes from?
- How might regularly beholding Christ’s glory free you from the exhaustion of self-focus?

Pray:

- Confess the ways you are tempted to place yourself at the center rather than Christ. Pray for freedom from comparison, jealousy, and the need for recognition.
- Ask God to expose where pride disguises itself as ambition, insecurity, or spiritual concern.
- Ask God to form in you the kind of humility and self-forgetfulness that leads to fullness of joy.

HYDRATION IS THE KEY TO VICTORY: JOHN 4:1-42

Isaac McPhee

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

– John 4:10

DEVOTIONAL:

As a teenager, I spent most of my summers in the mountains of Western Montana, guiding rock climbing, backpacking, and kayaking trips beneath an unrelenting sun, often far from civilization.

"Hydration is the key to victory" is the mantra we were taught as guides, and it was the lesson we passed along to every camper. We filled and refilled our water bottles throughout the day. Whenever a moment was found to stop and rest, water was the priority. We took water from lakes and streams and ran it through filters to make it drinkable. Under the heat of the summer sun, it's amazing how quickly the body begins to fail if it lacks water, even for a few hours; and it's equally amazing how quickly the body recovers once it is sated with that life-giving liquid.

If you live in an environment (like Western Washington) where water is plentiful, it can be difficult to fully understand the Bible's emphasis on water as a symbol of life. But we've all experienced thirst. To some extent, we've all been in a position where we *crave* water. Where we *need* water. Imagine, then, that this craving is a way of life. Imagine living in the desert environments of the Near East, where towns and cities only spring up in those rare locations where water is plentiful – around rivers and springs and lakes. They dig wells to hidden aquifers below ground, but water must be drawn by hand. There are no taps, no faucets, no showers, no reverse-osmosis-filtered water and ice dispensers in refrigerators.

When Jesus meets the Samaritan woman in John 4, she is doing what she probably did regularly – going to the community well to fill

her jars and return with water for her family. This was her routine. It's how she kept herself and her loved ones alive. But this woman knew that no matter how full she filled her jars they would soon be empty and she would be making this journey once more. She would continue returning to this well, no matter how tedious, no matter how arduous, because the body craves water. It *needs* it. It will die without it.

All of us crave life the way the body craves water. That is, we long - not just for survival, but for real, unbridled, unrestrained, uncomplicated *life*. We all know that life is short, that death is inevitable, and that if we are left on our own it requires constant, vigilant effort to find any semblance of meaning and hope in life.

When Jesus claims to this woman that He alone has the "living water," He is offering her something far more valuable than the opportunity to rest and take a drink. He's not offering the same thing the woman could get from the well. His next statement is even more profound: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (4:13-14).

Jesus is digging deep into the Old Testament, which is replete with stories about water and its importance. Jesus is portraying himself as the life-giving river flowing out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10), dividing into four rivers and providing water to "the whole face of the ground." He is portraying Himself as the saving water pouring out of the rock in the wilderness, keeping the people of Israel alive (Ex. 17:1-7). He is portraying Himself as the symbolic river that flows from the Presence of God (Ezek. 47), bringing fruitfulness to the land, turning the saltwater fresh and bringing life from the dead.

At the heart of Jesus' promise of Living Water is its *permanence*. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden," Jesus promised,

“and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). When we come to Jesus, He promises life that is permanent, abiding, ongoing, living, thriving.

This is more than just water Jesus is offering.

When you're thirsty, your body craves water, but no matter how many scientific advancements push water technology forward (electrolytes! carbonation! vapor distillation!), water's effect will only be temporary (thus keeping bottled water companies well-funded). When your soul is troubled, when your spirit is desperately in need, when you feel lost, purposeless, friendless, listless, rudderless - you can turn to many things that promise a moment of relief. You can turn to distractions to make you forget; you can give into addictions that offer a momentary salve; you can take solace in wealth or in the affections of others. These are momentary sips of water in the wilderness. Tomorrow you'll be taking up your pails and trudging out to the well once again.

Jesus provides the only water that is *forever*. Only Jesus promises, not merely life, but *abundant* life (John 10:10). Only He promises you a hope and a future and meaning and permanence.

So come to Him, you thirsty, and drink.

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Read:

- Read this chapter (John 4) through verse 42. What do you notice about the responses to Jesus' claims to the woman at the well?
 - How do His disciples respond? How do the people of Samaria respond?
- Consider the Bible's use of water. Can you think of stories related to rivers, wells, streams, springs, etc?
- Read Exodus 17:1-7 and Ezekiel 47:1-12. What do you notice about where the true water of life originates?

Examine:

- What does this story tell you about the relationship between the Jewish people and the Samaritans? How would Jesus' words and actions have been received by Jews in His day? What do they tell you about His feelings toward the Samaritans?
- How does Jesus respond to His disciples in verses 34-38? When Jesus uses the analogy of "sowing" and "reaping," what is He calling them to understand? How should the disciples understand their own participation in Jesus' work?
- How does the response of the Samaritan people contrast with other responses to Jesus throughout John's Gospel? (eg. 6:60-64; 7:40-52; 10:19-21). Why do you think these different responses are significant?

Apply:

- When you are feeling “spiritually thirsty” is your first instinct to turn to Jesus? Where have you been seeking spiritual refreshment outside of Jesus?
- How have “alternative” sources of spiritual refreshment failed you in the past?
- What would it practically look like in your life to receive and drink the “living water” Jesus offers?

Pray:

- Praise God for his goodness, and his steadfast, ongoing love. Praise him for his longing to bring all people into his family.
- Thank God for sending Jesus, and supplying the living water to all who would come and drink.
- Confess where you have sought life, refuge, or solace in things other than Him.
- Ask God to mold and shape your heart to recognize your need and desire nourishment in him alone.

I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SEE IT: JOHN 4:43-54

Rick Brackett

"Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way."

- John 4:50

DEVOTIONAL:

Have you ever said to yourself, "I'll believe it when I see it?" I know I have. Our culture prizes certainty. It's echoed in phrases like:

"Pics, or it didn't happen!"

"Show me the receipts!" or

"Seeing is believing."

We cling to proof because it feels safer than risk. Proof gives a sense of protection against disappointment and a sense of control in the face of uncertainty. But, if we're honest with ourselves, it's never enough. Our need for proof is constantly increasing, and somehow, it always feels incomplete. No matter how compelling the proof is, a seed of distrust always remains. Why is that?

If we go a layer deeper and ponder our insatiable need to avoid disappointment or our desire for control in every circumstance, we may find the longing that is underneath our longing for certainty. At our core, we're searching for something to be certain in; something we can trust without question, even when our circumstances are difficult. If that's the case, then maybe the real question isn't whether we've seen enough proof, but whether we're willing to trust what, or who, the proof is pointing us to.

In John 4, we find Jesus headed to Galilee, through Samaria, after being in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. He just spoke with the woman at the well, and many in Samaria believed he was the Christ, simply on his word. Now, as Jesus entered Galilee, people warmly received him only because they had seen the signs and miracles he had performed in Jerusalem. John is placing before us two different

responses to Jesus to consider — the Samaritans' faith-based response and the Galileans' proof-based response.

Finding ourselves in Cana, we meet a royal official who pleads with Jesus to come and heal his dying son. This official was likely wealthy and had access to the best doctors and medicine available at the time, so his appeal to Jesus would have come out of deep desperation. Jesus' response was sharp, an admonishment to the man and to the people in general, who needed to see miracles to believe. Jesus essentially says, "If you people don't see signs and wonders, you just will not believe." Something tells me this is not the response the official was expecting or hoping for. Out of despair, the official begs Jesus a second time to come and heal his son. Jesus' response is, "Go, your son will live." What strikes me is that, without directly asking the official, Jesus invites him to believe his son was healed, even though the miracle was not immediately seen; to trust not in the miracle he hoped to witness, but in the Messiah who speaks with authority.

Think about the faith required of the official in that moment. It was twenty miles back home, a long walk even in the ancient world, and a long way away from Jesus. With nothing but Jesus' promise he went on his way. Either Jesus truly was God and his son would be healed, or he wasn't, and the official would arrive home to devastating news. Wonderfully, along the road the official meets his servants and they shared news of his son's recovery. They confirm that the boy's fever had broken at the exact hour Jesus had spoken. The official's belief was affirmed, but more than that, his testimony sparked faith in his entire household. Notice - the official's household never saw Jesus in Cana, never saw any other signs or wonders, never heard Jesus say, "Go, your son will live," yet they believed because of the word and witness of a father who believed and proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah.

The royal official in Cana didn't receive a sign or a moment of visible healing. He received a promise and walked twenty miles home with

nothing but that promise in his heart. That's the faith Jesus was drawing out: trust rooted not in what Jesus could perform on demand, but in who Jesus was.

And that challenges us now just as it did the royal official 2000 years ago. How often do we wait for certainty before we trust God? Life rarely gives us the proof we think we need, yet Jesus still speaks: "Go, your son will live" (4:50). "Take heart, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). "I am with you always" (Matt 28:20). Faith isn't seeing first; it's seeing and trusting the faithful One who speaks life and holds authority over every circumstance. The royal official discovered that. His household discovered that. And we're invited to discover it too, every single day.

Perhaps today is the day to take God at his word and respond in faith. In the end, genuine faith in Jesus trusts the person, not the proof.

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Read:

- Slowly read through the entire passage. What words or phrases are repeated or emphasized (eg., "believe," "signs")?
- What do you notice about the royal official's approach to Jesus?
- What does this passage reveal about Jesus' authority and identity?
- In one sentence, how would you summarize the main message of this passage?

Examine:

- Why does Jesus challenge the crowd's desire for signs and wonders?
- How does the miracle's timing affirm Jesus' authority over time and space?
- What does the official's journey home tell us about his internal transformation?
- What role does testimony play in the belief of the official's household?
- What does this passage teach about the difference between faith in what Jesus does and faith in who He is?

Apply:

- What promise of God have you been waiting to see fulfilled before you fully believe it? How does this passage challenge your desire for control or certainty?
- What would it look like for you to “walk twenty miles” simply trusting Jesus’ promises today? Is there a situation where Jesus is inviting you to trust His word without immediate evidence?
- How might your faith be influencing your household or community?

Pray:

- Ask God to help you trust his Word even when the outcome isn’t visible.
- Pray for courage to take the next step of obedience, even if it feels risky.
- Thank Jesus for being trustworthy, even when we don’t understand His timing.
- Confess any areas where you’ve demanded proof before trusting God.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to remind you of Jesus’ promises when doubt creeps in.

WHAT KIND OF QUESTION IS THAT?: JOHN 5:1-18

Pete Corak

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

- John 5:6

DEVOTIONAL:

At one time or another, we've all been told there are no stupid questions, but sometimes you have to wonder. For instance, your phone rings at 3:00am, you pick it up, and someone on the other end asks, "Did I wake you?" Or you're at your local movie theater, waiting at the counter for your popcorn, when a friend walks up behind you and says, "Hey! What are you doing here?" Or what about a guy who has been really, really sick for most of his life and a stranger walks up to him and asks, "Do you want to be well?" What kind of question is that?

It's the kind of question Jesus would ask; the kind of question Jesus *did* ask of a man who was crippled and lying beside a pool. A pool that supposedly contained healing water. A pool surrounded by a crowd of infirm people. A pool where there might be healing if you could overcome your infirmity long enough to be the first into the water after it was "stirred up." A pool all too familiar to the man, who had been there "a long time." A pool where, one day, Jesus arrived and asked the invalid, "Do you want to be healed?"

Really? Do you want to be healed? Do you want to get well? Do you want to be whole? That's the question Jesus asked a man unable to walk for thirty-eight years? Apparently.

How come?

Perhaps because, after thirty-eight years, deep down, the man might have preferred the life he had known over a life that might bring new challenges. If you think about it, for thirty-eight years no one expected him to help with chores, or get a job, or feed himself, or

maybe provide for others. For thirty-eight years no one expected him to stand on his own two feet - because he couldn't stand on his own two feet. Being made well would change all that.

If he were to be made "whole", he'd be expected to live as whole people should live - to take responsibility for how to steward his newly acquired strength and capability. He would have to say good-bye to the low expectations of living as an invalid beside the pool, and to say hello to interacting with the world at large. Rather than being served, he would need to start thinking about how to serve those around the pool. If he were to be made whole, his whole way of living would be different and, in many ways, more demanding.

Maybe that's why Jesus asked Him, "Do you want to be healed?"

Or perhaps it had nothing to do with that. Maybe the question wasn't meant to probe if the man was tempted to choose his "as is" life over a "better" life. Perhaps it was intended to reveal within the man a resignation, a belief that he really had no options, that there really was no choice to make. After all, up to this point, all his best efforts at becoming whole had wholly failed. It's hard to get a man with no hope to respond to an invitation to "Get up, take up your bed, and walk" (5:8). So maybe, asking the question, "Do you want to be healed", was simply Jesus gently and graciously providing a way for faith to be awakened amidst deep despair.

In the end, we don't know why Jesus asked this question, but Jesus himself knew. Jesus "knew that he had been lying there a long time" and compassionately asked the question in order to spark the man's faith; to reawaken his trust in God.

Being healed was a step of faith. It meant believing that the One who could give him legs to walk would also be there to direct his steps. It meant believing that the power that could heal would be the same power that could sustain, believing that the divine determination to make him whole would come with the divine direction as to how to live as whole, even if it meant that taking up his mat would also mean

taking up his cross. It meant believing that even a little bit of faith, when placed in a great Savior, can make a broken man whole.

What kind of question might Jesus be asking us? Have we allowed a part of our life to be crippled by a fear of standing up? Or, has some part been hamstrung by unbelief, which keeps us down?

There may have been any number of reasons for someone to settle for the status quo, to decide that staying with what's been familiar "for a long time" might be easier than walking a new walk. There are any number of reasons for someone to respond to Jesus' question, "Nah, I'm good. I'll settle for this." But for those who look to the Savior in faith and confess, "Yes, Lord. I want to be whole," well, let the adventure begin!

Walking is the way to go! Walking with Jesus by His grace. Walking with Jesus for His glory.

REAP: READ, EXAMINE, APPLY, PRAY

Take some time to work through the REAP pattern as you approach this week's text. These questions are not designed to be completed in one sitting. Their purpose is to help you to meditate on the text throughout the week, preparing your heart for your Community Group discussion and the preaching of the Word on Sunday morning.

Read:

- By what authority was the man taking up his bed and walking on the Sabbath?
- While we might like to think that after thirty-eight years of wasting away walking would bring about a "happy ending", what controversy did the man walk into after he walked away from the pool?
- How do the Jewish leaders react when they find out Jesus healed on the Sabbath? Why?

Examine:

- What is the significance of Jesus healing the man with only a command, rather than using the water?
- Why didn't Jesus wait until the first day of the week to heal the man? Why do you think He healed on the Sabbath knowing it would provoke a response?
- What does Jesus' statement, "My Father is working until now, and I am working," reveal about Jesus' identity? How does it deepen the conflict with the Jews?
- What shift occurs in the Jews' attitude towards Jesus because of this miracle?

Apply:

- This man wasn't looking for Jesus, yet Jesus saw him and moved toward him. What encouragement might you draw from Jesus' pursuit of this man?
- Is there an area of your life - routines, expectations, comfort, fears - that might be keeping you from "being whole"? How would you respond if Jesus were to ask you, "Do you want to be well?"

Pray:

- Pray Psalm 139:23-24.
- Be open to discovering "grievous ways" tied not only to sin, but to fear and to complacency.
- Believe that Jesus is able to forgive and deliver you from those "grievous ways" and longs to lead you "in the ways everlasting."

IT'S HERE!: JOHN 5:18-29

Ben Sansburn

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself."

- John 5:25-26

DEVOTIONAL:

I can't think of two words more alive with excitement than *"it's here!"*

Just over twenty-one years ago, I awoke on my wedding day with those words on my lips. Seven months earlier, I had circled August 28th on the calendar. Those months had been a whirlwind of planning, preparation, and anticipation. But, even after sending invitations, ordering suits, purchasing dresses, and booking venues, the date seemed stubbornly stuck in the future. The waiting felt endless. Until suddenly, it wasn't. The "future" became the "now". *It's here!*

Most of us know that feeling, waiting for a child to be born, waiting for the new house to close, waiting for the new job to start, or just waiting for change to happen. There is a uniquely joyful exhilaration - sometimes even disbelief - when waiting gives way to fulfillment, when the future becomes the present. It's that experience John wants us to feel as we read this passage.

When Jesus spoke these words, God's people had been waiting a long time for him to act. God had promised through the prophets that he would redeem his people, rescue them from their enemies, and save them from sin and death forever.

Jesus' words in this passage allude to a particular promise God made through the prophet Ezekiel. In a vision (Ez. 37), God brought Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones and commanded him to speak the word of the Lord over them. As he did, breath entered the

bones. What was dead came to life. The imagery portrayed God's promise to restore his people and bring them to life. Dead bones would hear the word of the Lord and live.

For centuries, that promise still felt far off. God's people floundered under foreign rule, generation after generation still died. Many Jews believed in a future resurrection - a day when the enemies of oppression and death would finally be undone, but facing exile, loss, and death, that day felt distant. It was promised, but not present.

In that context, Jesus' words in verse 25 would have landed with shocking force: "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

Imagine growing up, burying those you love, over and over again - parents, friends, children? At every funeral, you would think, "I know one day, God will fix this." Then one day, a carpenter from Nazareth arrives and announces that the promised day is *today*. That long-anticipated 'hour' is no longer far away on the horizon; it has actually arrived - in him. The moment God will finally defeat death is no longer a slowly approaching reality; it's here - breaking into the present. "What Jesus is now saying," comments N.T. Wright, "is that with his coming. . . This work of raising the dead has already begun."

In just a few chapters, Jesus will demonstrate this quite literally. He will stand outside a tomb and speak life to a dead man: "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43) Death dies when it hears just a word from Jesus. But how is the death of death possible? Jesus tells us in this passage: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26).

Life doesn't just flow *through* Jesus; it resides *in* him. The same self-existent, uncreated life that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son. As the Father is the giver and sustainer of life, so Jesus gives and sustains life. John has already told us this in his prologue: "In him was life..." (John 1:4), but here Jesus says it himself. This is

nothing less than a claim to divinity. Jesus can speak life to the dead because he is the source of life itself.

Of course, the resurrection of Lazarus isn't the end of the story. Jesus' power over death will be on full display in his own resurrection, where he will face head-on the power of death and pass through it to the other side in the miracle of resurrection life. This passage is preparing us for that.

At the very center of the Christian faith is the miracle of life out of death. Easter means that resurrection life is no longer confined to some distant future, it has entered history. The hour has come, it's here! Jesus has power and authority *right now* to call the dead to life by his powerful Word.

Of course, we too are still waiting. Our bodies will age, our muscles will weaken, our eyesight will fail, and we will one day die. But even now, we experience a foretaste of resurrection life. We know it spiritually through the forgiveness of our sins, our adoption into the family of God, and the presence and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. These realities put flesh on dead bones. They are the downpayment of a future resurrection hope, when we will dwell forever in a world made new.

Because of Jesus' resurrection, we have life. It's here!

If you find yourself weary in the waiting, in a world where death still exists, hear Jesus' words of hope again: "the hour is coming and is now here." Life is breaking into death. And those who hear his voice will live.

REAP: READ, EXAMINE, APPLY, PRAY

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Read:

- Slowly read John 5:18–29. What repeated words or ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- What is the context of the passage? What events precede it in John's narrative and how do those inform what is happening in this section?
- What emotions does this passage stir in you — comfort, awe, fear, confusion, assurance?
- If you summarized Jesus' main message here in one sentence, what would it be?

Examine:

- Why were the religious leaders seeking to kill Jesus (v. 18)? What exactly about his claims crossed the line? What "big claims" does Jesus make here that would have shocked his original listeners?
- What does this passage teach us about the relationship between the Father and the Son (vv. 19–23)? How is unity expressed? How is distinction maintained?
- What divine roles does Jesus claim to hold in this passage? (Look especially at vv. 21–23, 26–27).
- Jesus talks about two "hours": one that "is now here" (v. 25) and one that "is coming" (v. 28). What's the difference? What does each refer to?
- What does this passage teach about judgment? Who judges? What determines the difference between resurrection to life and resurrection to judgment?

Apply:

- Jesus claims total authority over life and judgment. In what areas of your life do you functionally live as if you are the judge or authority?
- Verse 24 says believers “have passed from death to life.” Where do you see evidence of Jesus bringing life into previously “dead” places in you?
- Where are you tempted to think resurrection hope is only “future,” rather than something breaking into the present?
- How does knowing Jesus has the final word over both life and judgment shape how you face death, grief, or fear?

Pray:

- Thank Jesus for his authority, his unity with the Father, and his power to raise the dead.
- Pray for deeper confidence that we have truly “passed from death to life,” and for faith, hope, and assurance where life still feels shadowed by grief, fear, or decay.
- Pray by name for those who feel spiritually dead — that they would hear the voice of Jesus and live.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

COMMENTARIES:

- Gary Burge, *NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2000).
- D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991).
- Bruce Milne, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of John* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993).
- Andreas Kostenberger, *Encountering Biblical Studies: Encountering John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999).

NEW TESTAMENT INTRODUCTIONS:

- Kostenberger, et. al., *The Cradle, The Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2009).
- I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2004).
- Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014).

ONLINE:

- The Bible Project, “Guide to the Book of John”:
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-john/>
- TGC Introduction to the Gospel of John Course:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/john/>

