






















Studies on John's Gospel

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In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: The Message of John by Bruce Milne, Tyndale Commentary John by R.V.G.Tasker, Luke for Everyone, John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 and John for Everyone part 2 chapters 11-21 by Tom Wright, The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock, The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page, The Lion Handbook to the Bible, lecture series at Macquarie University on Deuteronomy by John Walton, August 2013, "On Jesus as Attuned to Life, not Good and Evil" an essay by Mark Strom May 2010, talks by Mark Strom on Paul 9/4/2011 and Paul and the Open Cosmos/Society/Heart 15/8, 19/9, 24/10/2014 available at www.gospelconversations.com, talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University 4, 5, 11, 12/7/2014, John's Gospel by Chris Ekins (2007), Roger Green's booklets on John's Gospel chapters 1-6 (1998) and chapters 7-12 (2001), The Final Farewell John 13-17 by Tracy Lauersen, John The Way to True Life by Douglas Connelly, Light the Dark the gospel of John 37 studies by Bill Salier, Mark Wormell and Andrew Judd of St Barnabus, Broadway, the Bible Brief on John chs 1-6 by Tony Payne from The Briefing #345 June 2007 and The Briefing #350 November 2007, various Nooma videos and Peanuts and Wizard of Id cartoons.

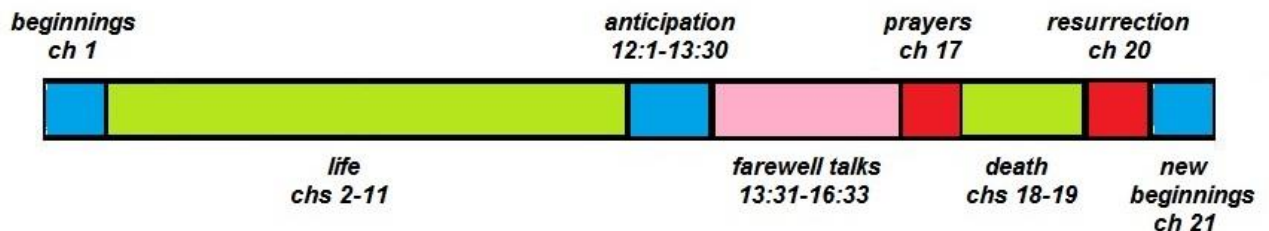
[T]oday, we are invited to approach reverently within the walls of the Word of God, to gaze wonderingly and adoringly upon the glory of the everlasting Son made flesh, and then go forth to live for him amid the realities of our everyday world. John's gospel helps us to do that. But who the Son is in himself remains a mystery beyond our comprehension.

It is this mystery which lies behind the revelation in this gospel, as in all the gospels. It is also the explanation of the effect of a study of John's gospel, for while by the end of it we sense we know Christ better, at the same moment we find ourselves having to acknowledge that he is even further beyond our grasp. This should not surprise us. If the ancient theological maxim is valid, *Deus comprehensus non est Deus* (a God who is comprehended fully is not God), then it is equally true to assert, *Christus comprehensus non est Deus* (a Christ who is comprehended fully is not divine).

The mystery of Jesus Christ is the theme of this gospel; always beyond us, yet always summoning us to explore it more fully. The exploration and service of the Godhead will be our endless, though blissful, task in the world to come; but we can begin it now, and there can be no better place to launch out into the depths of it than to study, and expound, this great gospel by John.

From The Message of John by Bruce Milne pp 26-27.

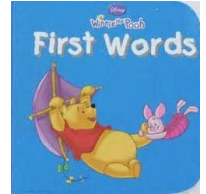
John's Gospel



Study 1, John ch 1, beginnings

Getting started

1. What was it like when you first learnt to read?



2. What effect have words had on your life?

Bible

3. Read John 1:1-5.
What is the connection (a) between the Word and God?

(b) between words and creation (John 1:3, Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26)?

(c) between words and life/light (John 1:4-5, 9)?

4. Read John 1:6-15.
(a) Who is the Word?

(b) How is it that the Bible is also described as “the Word” or “the Word of God”?

(c) What connection does the Bible have with Jesus (see John 5:39-47, Luke 24:25-27)?

(d) In Heb 4:12 the word of God is described as living, active, sharper than any double-edged sword etc. Is this “word of God” Jesus or the Bible? Give reasons for your answer.



The 'word' or 'logos' as John uses it in John 1:1 would have been a significant 'title' for both Jews and Greeks. For Jews it would have reminded them about God's activity in the Old Testament - God works through his word - in creating etc. Greeks saw the 'word' or 'logos' as the organising principle of the universe, it was the logos that gave order to everything. Both Jews and Greeks would have been shocked to think that the word became flesh. In verse 14 John uses language which has its background in Exodus 34 and 40 – God shows Moses his glory and makes his dwelling with Israel in a tent – the word John uses for dwelling literally means 'pitched his tent' amongst us.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 1 by Bill Salier.

5. What are the 3 meanings for "world"?

6. What does the "true light" enlighten everyone about?

7. How does someone get born of God (v13)?

8. Read John 1:16-18.
What is (a) the law?

(b) grace?

(c) truth?

(d) What is the connection between law and grace & truth, if any?

(e) Do we have any need for law now that we have grace and truth through Jesus?

9. (a) How has Jesus made the Father known (v18)?

(b) What does it mean to know God?

10. Read John 1:19-34.
Why is John the Baptist important?

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

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 2 by Bill Salier.

11. Read John 1:35-42.
How is Jesus' question in v 38 answered?

12. Read John 1:43-51.
(a) How does Nathanael's attitude change?

(b) Is Nathanael "jumping the gun" in v 49? Why/why not?

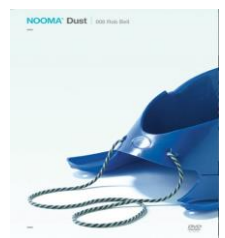
The background to 1:47-51 is found in the story of Jacob in the Old Testament. Jacob is described as a deceitful or guileful one in Gen 27:35. Nathanael is not like Jacob – one translation of this verse runs "An Israelite in whom there is no Jacob" – Nathanael was all that an Israelite should be and he recognises Jesus as the King of Israel. The heavens being opened also has its background in a Jacob story – see Gen 28:10-22.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 3 by Bill Salier.

Video

The Nooma video, #8, Dust, by Rob Bell is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In each video Rob Bell takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way.

13. What was the main point of the video?



14. Why did the disciples so readily follow Jesus, according to Rob Bell?
15. Was there anything that surprised you in the video or anything you didn't know before seeing the video?
16. (a) Have you any questions about the video or was there anything you didn't understand?

(b) Did you get the thing with the neighbour shovelling snow?

Ans. At the beginning Rob Bell says he wants to be a person who does the right thing, like help your neighbour shovelling snow. But he doesn't do that. At the end of the video his neighbour has cleared her drive *and* her neighbour's drive. The neighbour has done the right thing and set the example of love and grace.

(c) Do you know why the video was called "Dust"?

17. Did you agree with Rob Bell's thoughts on faith?

(a) "It is good to have faith in God but God has faith in us. God chooses us because he has faith that we can be like Jesus."

(b) Rob Bell says Peter started sinking because he lost faith in *himself*. Agree or disagree? Why?

"May you believe in God and may you come to see that God believes in you. May you have faith in Jesus and may you come to see that Jesus has faith that you can be like him, a person of love and compassion and truth, a person of forgiveness and peace and grace, joy and hope and may you be covered in the dust of your rabbi, Jesus."

To finish

18. After you've seen a movie trailer you would usually have a pretty good idea of what the movie is about. After reading the first chapter of John what do you think John's Gospel will be about?

19. Why did you follow Jesus?

20. Describe the life that Jesus has given you?

Study 2, John ch 2, wine and the Temple

Getting started

1. Have you ever fallen into “traps for young players”?

If so, give an example?



2. What is the difference between being naïve and being trusting?

Bible

3. Read John 2:1-11.



From John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 by Tom Wright p xii.

(a) What do you make of the conversation between Jesus and his mother (vv 3-4)?

(b) What does this event say about (i) Jesus?

(ii) parties?

(iii) wine?

[W]edding feasts could last for a week, or maybe two. It was expected, at a wedding, that guests would contribute to the marriage feast, and as their leader Jesus would be expected to be responsible for the contributions of his group. To Mary, therefore, this is a perfect opportunity to fulfil his duties as a guest. Initially, in fact, she is not after a miracle, she is asking for Jesus to do what is expected of guests: to contribute something to avoid the embarrassing situation.

Jesus, of course, does the unexpected. Initially he seems distant from his mother, dismissive even. 'Woman,' he says of her worries about the wine, 'it's somebody else's problem.' His mother, as mothers have across the centuries, pays no attention to her son's objections and just tells the servants to do as he says. And Jesus orders that six stone jars should be filled with water, which he then turns into wine.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page p 91.

Running out of wine at a gathering like this constituted a major social embarrassment – there is even the possibility that the groom could have been sued for this happening. Jesus' address of his mother is simply the word "woman" – it sounds a little more harsh to our ears than it perhaps was though it is certainly a formal and 'distancing' form of address for a son to address his mother. Notice also that Mary is not named throughout the story – there is no attempt to draw attention to her and she is in no way the 'master' of her son as some varieties of theology that venerate Mary would suggest. . . .

The abundant quantity and quality of the wine that Jesus created is remarked upon in this account – while not the main point it shows that what Jesus will do will be of the highest quality and will be abundant, generous, gracious as you would expect God to be. John calls this the first of the signs – this is his special word for Jesus' miracles – they are signs pointing towards something. The fact that he labels this as the first suggests that there is something foundational or programmatic about this miracle.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 4 by Bill Salier.

4. Read John 2:12-25.

[U]nder David and Solomon, Israel had been a safe and prosperous nation. According to his promises to Abraham, God had planted them in the Promised Land, subdued their enemies, and blessed them with prosperity. This was the historical high point of Israel as a nation.

From that point on, things went downhill. Israel was destroyed because of its chronic apostasy and rebellion against God. By the time of the Exile to Babylon in 587 BC, the everlasting kingdom promised to David in 2 Samuel 7 was in ruins (see Ps 89).

But all was not lost. God's promise to Abraham still stood. As Israel's fortunes declined, the prophets emphatically declared that God would restore his kingdom. . . .

The Jews of Jesus' day were sick of being losers. Nearly five centuries had passed since the last of the Old Testament prophets, and during that period, with a few exceptions, Israel had suffered nothing but humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles (first the Greeks and then the Romans). . . .

Into this mixed environment of messianic hope strode Jesus, proclaiming that the time had finally come - the kingdom of God was at hand.

From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 pp 9-11 by Phillip Jensen & Tony Payne.

(a) Why did Jesus react like he did in the Temple?

Play John2_13t017clearingTheTemplePeteNicholasAllSouls.mp3 (4 mins).



The Temple in Jerusalem was planned by David (c. 1000 BC) and built by his son Solomon as the central sanctuary for all Israel. It was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC and rebuilt by the returning exiles. Desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC. Rebuilding and beautification began by Herod the Great in 19 BC and completed in 63 AD. The Court of the Gentiles contained the thriving markets in sacrificial animals and sacred money for the temple offerings. Here too men would gather in the shaded porticos to listen to any teacher who cared to set up his stand. The Temple was not only the place of sacrifice, it was believed to be the unique dwelling of YHWH on earth, the place heaven and earth met. It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. From John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 by Tom Wright p 178 and The Lion Handbook to the Bible article by Richard France p 494.

(b) What connection is there between a temple and Jesus' body (vv 19-22)?

(c) What do you think it was that Jesus didn't trust about people (vv 23-25)?

To finish

5. How do we decide if someone is trustworthy or not?



6. (a) Do we seek signs today?

(b) Should we seek signs today? Why/why not?

(c) How do we help people whose faith is weak and are always seeking signs?

Study 3, John ch 3, Nicodemus

Getting started

1. In layman's terms give a definition for evangelism.



2. Outline a method of evangelism that you are familiar with, that is, what would you ask or what would you say or in what general direction would you try to lead the conversation.

Bible

3. Read John 3:1-21.

The Pharisees have been frequently characterised as holier-than-thou people who spent their time loading rules and regulations onto other people. Call someone 'a Pharisee' and we cast them as a sanctimonious hypocrite: pompous, self-satisfied, smug. Of course, such a caricature owes its origins to Jesus' stinging criticism of the Pharisees as recorded in the Gospels. They were 'whitewashed tombs' (Matt. 23:27), looking pious but full of evil. No doubt there were some Pharisees like that — as there are in any religious movement — but what is interesting about the Pharisees is that they were, at heart, a kind of grass-roots holiness movement. They were popular in the rural areas and the poorer parts of the cities, precisely because they were attempting to redefine Judaism in a way which the ordinary Jew could follow. They did create a mass of rules and regulations which, judging by Jesus' criticisms, caused difficulty and confusion, but they did so because they wanted to help people observe the Jewish faith. Their rules and regulations, complex though they are, were an attempt to deal, with the complexities of Torah law in everyday life. Their rulings reflect life in the villages and hamlets of Palestine, with all its myriad conflicts and difficulties. If they were trying to help, though, to solve the problems of observing Torah law in everyday life, why did Jesus lay into them so much? The answer seems to lie in the nature of that solution. The Pharisees solved the problem of obeying the laws by weaving a web of even more intricate laws and decisions. Reading the Mishnah — the code which was developed from this tradition — one is struck by the sheer complexity of everything.

Jesus' solution was simpler: don't do it. Cut throw the religious red tape. . . . Jesus had no time for the minutiae of religious observance if it got in the way of real repentance and real relationship. He ate with the wrong people, he did not wash properly (Mark 7:15), he did not see the need for fasting (Mark 2:19), his Sabbath observance was questionable (Matt. 12:1-8). He did not even acknowledge the priority of Moses' instructions (Mark 10:2-9).

Both the Pharisees and Jesus wanted to democratise holiness, but they went about it in different ways. Jesus' approach was to shatter the taboos.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 93-94.

(a) What do you think might be the significance of coming to see Jesus at night (v 2)?

(b) What do you think it means to be born again (vv 3-6)?

(c) What does 'born of water and the spirit' mean (vv 5-8)?

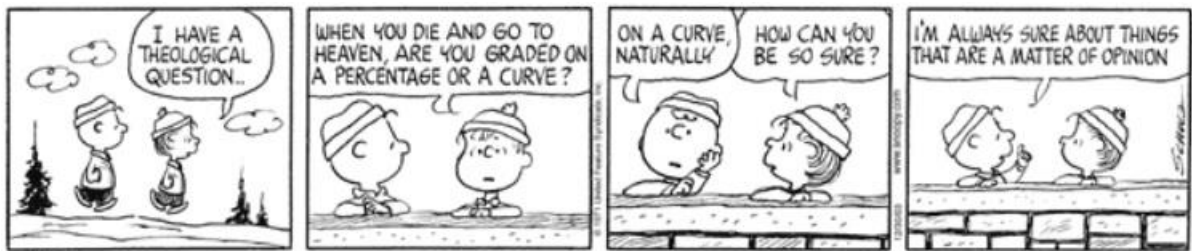
The meaning of 'born of water and spirit' (not 'Spirit') is unclear, and many suggestions have been made. Given that Nicodemus knew the OT, and was not yet a Christian, it is likely that 'water' is not a metaphor for baptism. It is more likely the background is the cleansing and purification associated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

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 6 by Mark Wormell.

(d) What does the wind analogy teach us about the Holy Spirit?

(e) In v14 Jesus refers to an event in the Old Testament (Num 21:1-9).
What is the link between Jesus and the bronze snake on the pole?

(f) What is eternal life (vv 15-16)?



4. What does Jesus say is essential for entering God's kingdom / having life in . . .

Verse 3 ?

Verse 5 ?

Verse 16 ?

Verse 21 ?

5. How is light significant in Jesus' speech?

6. (a) Would you describe Jesus conversation with Nicodemus as evangelistic?

(b) If so, outline the method he uses?

7. Read John 3:22-36.
 (a) Why did John baptise people (see also Luke 3:1-6, Is 40:3-5)?

“The old prophets had spoken of a time of renewal, through which God himself would come back to them. . . **Baptism**, plunging into the river Jordan, was a powerful sign of this renewal. When the children of Israel had come out of Egypt – a story they all know well because of their regular Passovers and other festivals – they were brought through the Red Sea, through the Sinai wilderness, then through the Jordan into the promised land. Now they were in slavery again – in their own land! . . . John was doing what the prophet Isaiah had said: preparing a pathway of the Lord himself to return to his people. This was the time. Rescue was at hand.”

From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 32-33.

[B]aptism was the rite by which Gentiles would become ‘Jews’; those who were already within the Israelite family did not need it. By preaching baptism to the latter (Luke 3:3), John places Jews in the category of Gentiles. Physical relation to Abraham is of no avail.

‘All the people’ who responded to John’s preaching ‘were baptized’ (Luke 3:21), for all needed to acknowledge themselves to be in a wrong relation to God.”

From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 55.

The commentator, Don Carson, notes this is the fourth successive section to point out the ways Jesus surpasses Judaism. Jesus provides new wine that was better than ritualistic purification. Jesus displaces the temple, and points to the way Jesus is the place we meet God, or the ultimate point of mediation between humans and God. Jesus fulfils the prophesy of ‘water and spirit, in the OT, and proves in his death to be the ‘ultimate antitype’ of the snake ‘lifted up’ in the dessert. And John surpasses John the Baptist and his rite of purification.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 7 by Mark Wormell.

- (b) Have you been baptised? Why/why not?

- (c) What does John the Baptist think of Jesus?

To finish

8. (a) Do you think people feel condemned when we focus on sin in evangelism (see v 17)?
 Why/why not?

- (b) How would your method of evangelism change if you focused on life (vv 15-16) or light (vv 19-21) instead of sin?

- life

- light

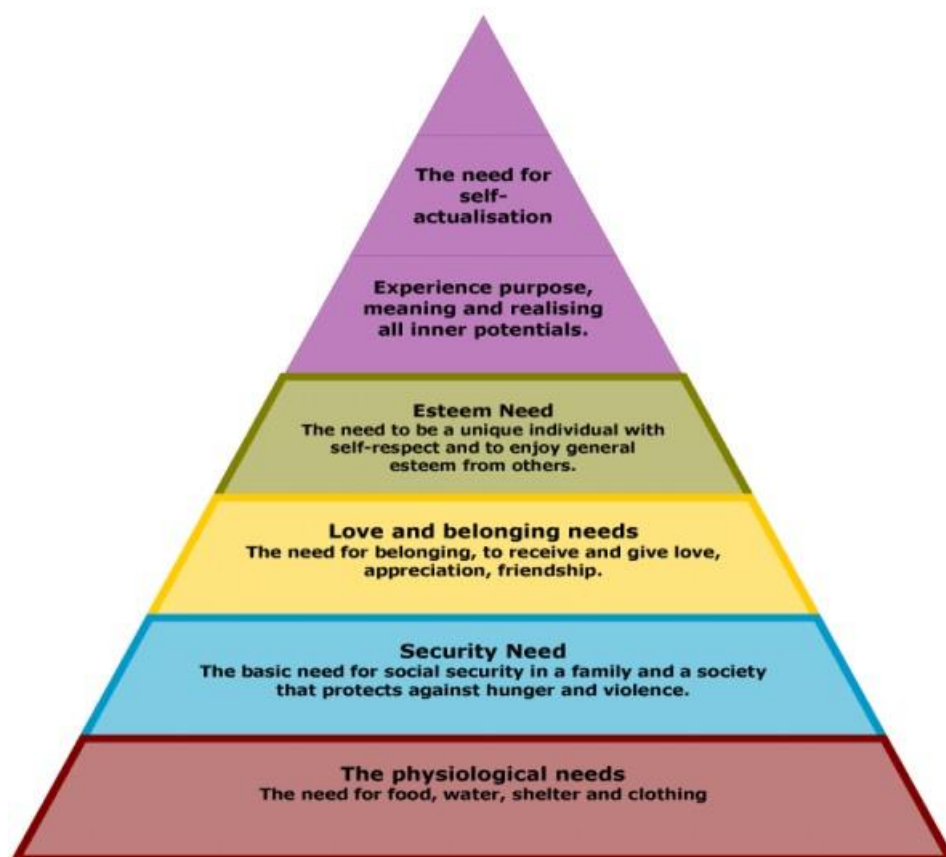
Study 4, John ch 4, the woman of Samaria

Getting started

1. How do you engage someone in conversation when you meet them the first time?



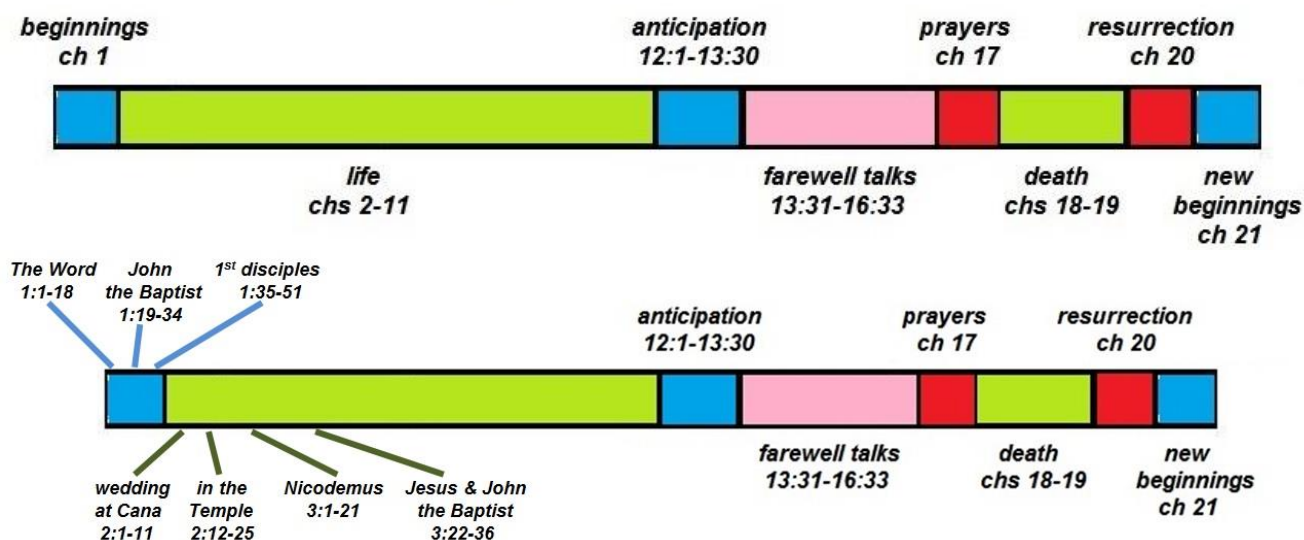
2. What are your deepest needs?



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

The story so far . . .

John's Gospel



Bible

3. Read John 4:1-18.
People usually went for water in the cool of the day. Why do you think she was there at midday ('the sixth hour')?
4. What was unusual about Jesus talking to her (vv 7-9)?
5. What do you think Jesus means by 'living water'? How is it different from water from the well?
6. Compare v15 with v16. Why does Jesus ask about her husband?
7. Read John 4:19-26.
(a) Compare vv 16-18 with vv 19-20. Why does the woman change the subject?

(b) How does Jesus deal with the side-track (vv 21-26)?
8. The **enmity between Jew and Samaritan** was centuries old. Nearly five hundred years earlier, when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon, he considered Sanballat the Samaritan to be a Gentile and refused any contact with him. When Sanballat's daughter married Joida the high priest, Nehemiah banished the pair immediately (Neh 13:8). During the Maccabean era, John Hyrcanus burned the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim to the ground and utterly destroyed the town of Shechem — the ruins were still visible during Jesus' day, near the town of Sychar. Hyrcanus had destroyed the temple because it was seen as an abomination by the Jews. There was only one true temple and it was in Jerusalem, not on Mount Gerizim. To Jews this proved an insurmountable problem. 'When shall we take them back?' asks a later rabbi about the Samaritans. 'When they renounce Mount Gerizim and confess Jerusalem and the resurrection of the Dead.' Unsurprisingly, the Samaritans concluded that there could never be any reconciliation between the two sides: they were a separate people, and they would always be separate.
Politically both Samaritan and Jew were under the same master: Rome. When Pompey captured Palestine he gave control of the city of Samaria and the surrounding region to the province of Syria. It returned to Jewish control during the reign of Herod, who, in a typically shrewd diplomatic move, invested heavily in the infrastructure of the city of Samaria. He renamed it Sebaste, the Greek version of the name Augustus, built a temple dedicated to the emperor and settled the city with his veteran soldiers and neighbouring peoples. According to Josephus, some six thousand colonists were settled in Sebaste. One of Herod's wives, Malthace, may have been Samaritan; at any rate she came from the area, and was a Gentile.
There were still sectarian outrages and attacks. Josephus records that during the early years of Roman rule some Samaritans infiltrated the temple and put dead bodies in the courts, an act which rendered the entire building unclean. To Jerusalem Jews, Samaritans were renegades, unclean, impure mutant Jews who spread false teaching about the temple and engaged in underhand, dirty tricks. Probably Galilean Jews had a slightly better relationship with Samaritans — they might have to travel through the territory to reach the temple. Even so, there was hatred, deep hatred, and nothing would ever change that.
From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 97-98.
(a) According to vv 20-25 what does Jesus say is important for worship?

(b) How do you do that type of worship?

Video

The Nooma video, #4, Sunday, by Rob Bell is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In this video Rob Bell talks about church and church is usually associated with worship which is where we were up to in John ch 4.

9. What are your first impressions of this video?



10. What is the main point of the video?

11. At the beginning there were well-dressed people filing into the building with organ music playing.
(a) Did you think they were going to church?

(b) Later in the video when the camera showed us a wider vision of people at tables in the restaurant do you think there was a subtle message about people at church? If so, what was that message?

12. When Rob Bell starts his commentary he says he used to go to church because he was supposed to but things didn't seem right and he wonders if this is what God had in mind. Thinking about church as it is today and comparing it with your Bible knowledge, do you think this is what God had in mind?

13. Rob Bell next describes a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. He begins by talking about how Jesus was invited to a meal but ignores the hand washing rules. He is commenting from 2 passages that are probably describing the same event: Matt ch 23 and Luke 11:37-54. We will look at the Luke passage.
Read Luke 11:37-46.

Rob Bell finishes this bit by saying "Jesus has infinite patience and understanding for people who are genuinely searching for God but people who claim to know and speak for God but have cold, hard hearts – Jesus is relentless in slamming them."

How do you think all this applies to church today?

14. Then he talks about buying flowers for his wife. He says that if he is buying flowers out of a sense of duty or because they were on sale or because he felt the house needed them then his wife probably won't even want the flowers because she wants his heart. The Bible says something similar.
Read Isaiah 29:13. Context: Chapters 28 and 29 of Isaiah are full of scorn, particularly for the leaders of Israel and Judah who ignore God's warnings through his prophets. Judgement will follow, beginning with Jerusalem (Ariel).

How much of what we do at church is about obeying rules or going through the motions?

15. Rob Bell talks about giving money and says that one motive for giving could be guilt i.e. you give to get God off your back. We will read the passage that he refers to in the Old Testament but before we do that . . .
 . . . why do we give?

16. Read Isaiah 1:11-17.
Context: Isaiah begins his book with the denunciation of the Israelites for their rebellion against God.

Rob Bell is drawing a comparison between the Old Testament sacrificial system and our giving of money to God. What should we be doing instead?

17. Rob Bell finishes the video by saying that people are turned off by narrow minds and judgemental attitudes, and so is God. He says that a lot of people confuse religion with God, and walk away from both. He continues,
“The point isn’t Christianity. The point is being a Christian. It means being a follower of Jesus. It’s being connected with everything that is true and good and right. Everything that goes on around us, that reminds us that there is so much more going on around us than we realise. Could anything be more beautiful?”

What do you think he means by his final statement? Do you agree with it? Why/why not?

18. Read John 4:25-26. The woman changes tack again (v25).
How would she have felt after Jesus' answer?

19. Read John 4:27-42.
What did the woman do as a result of her encounter with Jesus?

20. What (if any) significance do you see in her leaving her water jar behind (v28)?

21. (a) What are the different meanings for food in vv 31-38?

(b) What are the disciples focused on?

(c) What does Jesus want them to open their eyes and see?

(d) How does this relate to what is happening among the Samaritans?

22. What did the woman mean by v39?

23. What do vv 39-42 tell us about faith in Jesus?

24. Read John 4:43-54.

Note on v 44: Some suggest 'own country' refers to Judea, where Jesus faced opposition. Some suggest it means Galilee, and say that, despite the response of the official, Jesus did not receive the honour there that was due to him. But perhaps 'own country' refers to both Judea and Galilee, and are in contrast to the success Jesus had just had in the foreign land of Samaria.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 8 by Mark Wormell.

Does Jesus' statement in verse 48 hold true in our society? Why/why not?

To finish

25. How does the woman's attitude change over the course of her encounter with Jesus?

26. A story which started with Jesus' need finishes with the woman's (and our) deepest needs being revealed.

(a) What were the woman's deepest needs? How did Jesus meet them?

(b) How does Jesus meet our deepest needs (use your answers to question 2)?



Study 5, John ch 5, healing at the pool

Getting started

1. What is one superstition you have or that you've heard other people have?
2. What is superstition?
3. What is the difference between superstition and faith?



Bible

4. Read John 5:1-15.

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

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 10 by Bill Salier

- (a) What happened to verse 4?
- (b) Is the invalid superstitious (see v 7)? Why/why not?
- (c) How does v 7 help to explain the riddle of the missing v 4
- (d) What are the Jews (v 10) concerned about?
- (e) What is Jesus concerned about?
- (f) Is Jesus saying that bad things will happen to you if you sin (v 14)?
- (g) What impression do you have of Jesus at this point?

5. Read John 5:16-30.
What does Jesus say about life?

6. Read John 5:31-47.
Jesus speaks about the reliability of the information he is giving. In a Jewish legal setting at least two witnesses were required to substantiate a claim and a person could not testify on their own behalf.
From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 10 by Bill Salier

(a) What does it mean to testify in Jesus' favour (v 32)?

(b) Who or what testifies in Jesus' favour?

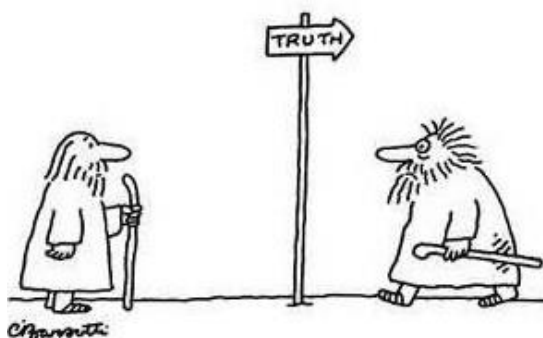
(c) What does Jesus say about (i) the Scriptures (v 39)?

(ii) Moses (v 45-46)?

(iii) Why don't either of these arguments work for the people Jesus is addressing (see John 5:16)?

To finish

7. How do we know what Jesus says is the truth (John 5:24) as opposed to superstition?



Study 6, John ch 6, bread of life

Getting started

1. What do you need in order to have a good life?



Bible

2. Read John 6:1-15.
What do you think is the most remarkable thing about this event?
3. What do you make of verses 12-13? What might Jesus be teaching his disciples?
4. (a) How did the crowd respond to the miracle? Why?

(b) How does Jesus react? Why?
5. How is Jesus testing Philip in vv 5-7?
6. Read John 6:16-21.
(a) What do you think non-Christians would make of this story?

(b) Why do you believe this story (assuming you *do* believe it)?

(c) 'If only Jesus were here today and could do some more miracles, then people would really find it easier to believe in him' What do you think of this statement on the basis of what you have been reading in John's Gospel?
7. Read John 6:22-40.
What is Jesus claiming about himself in . . .
V27?

V33?

V35?



Vv 37-40?

8. (a) What does God require of us (v29)?

(b) What does “believing” mean?

(c) What does this say about Jesus?
9. What promises are there for the believer in vv 35-40?
10. How would you explain v 35 to someone who’d never read the Bible before?
11. Read John 6:41-71. Jesus speaks of ‘eating his flesh and drinking his blood’ (vv 51-59).
Read Leviticus 17:10-12. Context: Leviticus is the book of laws given by God to his people through Moses. There are laws governing the sacrifices, the priesthood, purity in daily life, morality, feasts and festivals, and tithing. Chapter 17 is a safeguard against sacrificing to idols with particular attention to the blood of animals.
(a) Why was drinking blood such a problem?

(b) Why is it necessary to drink the blood of Jesus?
12. How did the Jews respond to this teaching?
13. Why did many disciples leave Jesus after the events in this chapter (see vv 60-71)?

There are two main options that have been suggested for understanding the verse [62]. First, Jesus is saying that there will be further offence when he is raised up on the cross. Second, Jesus is suggesting that

there will be surprise and vindication of his words when Jesus returns to the Father via the cross and therefore everything he said is true.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 14 by Bill Salier

14. Why was what Jesus taught, so hard to accept then and now?

In John's account, after the crowd find him at Capernaum, Jesus gives a speech during which he states, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35-40) and the range of response is illuminating. Most of his listeners are simply baffled: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' (John 6:52). Even his disciples were perplexed. 'This teaching is too hard,' they complain. Then John drops in a little bombshell: 'Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him' (John 6:66).

Things have changed. While the Synoptic Gospels do not state this as overtly, there are unmistakable signs of discontent. Mark records that the disciples 'did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened' (Mark 6:52). They have almost become like Jesus' enemies: Mark uses the same phrase to describe the Pharisees (Mark 3:5; 10:5) and Jesus repeats the accusation in frustration at the disciples' lack of understanding (Mark 8:17). Why would their hearts be hardened? (The implication is that this goes beyond simple misunderstanding into an almost wilful incomprehension.) Perhaps it was because their hopes, too, were being confounded. Jesus had clearly and definitively rejected the kingship pressed on him by the crowds. But the disciples, too, had bought into the idea of the Right Messiah. Now they were beginning to question when exactly Jesus was going to fall into line. He had all that power — when was he going to use it?

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 172-173.

15. What teachings of Jesus either offend you
or make it hard for you to stand apart from the crowd (vv 60-66)?

To finish

16. Read Exodus 16:1-8.
(a) What similarities are there between the manna and Jesus, the bread of life?

(b) What differences are there between the manna and Jesus, the bread of life?

(c) How was the response of the people similar on both occasions?
17. This is the first of several 'I am' claims that Jesus makes about himself (see also John 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1). What is the significance of the 'I am' statements for Jews (see Exodus 3:13-15)?
18. What part does Jesus play in giving you a good life?



Study 7, John ch 7, opposition and unbelief

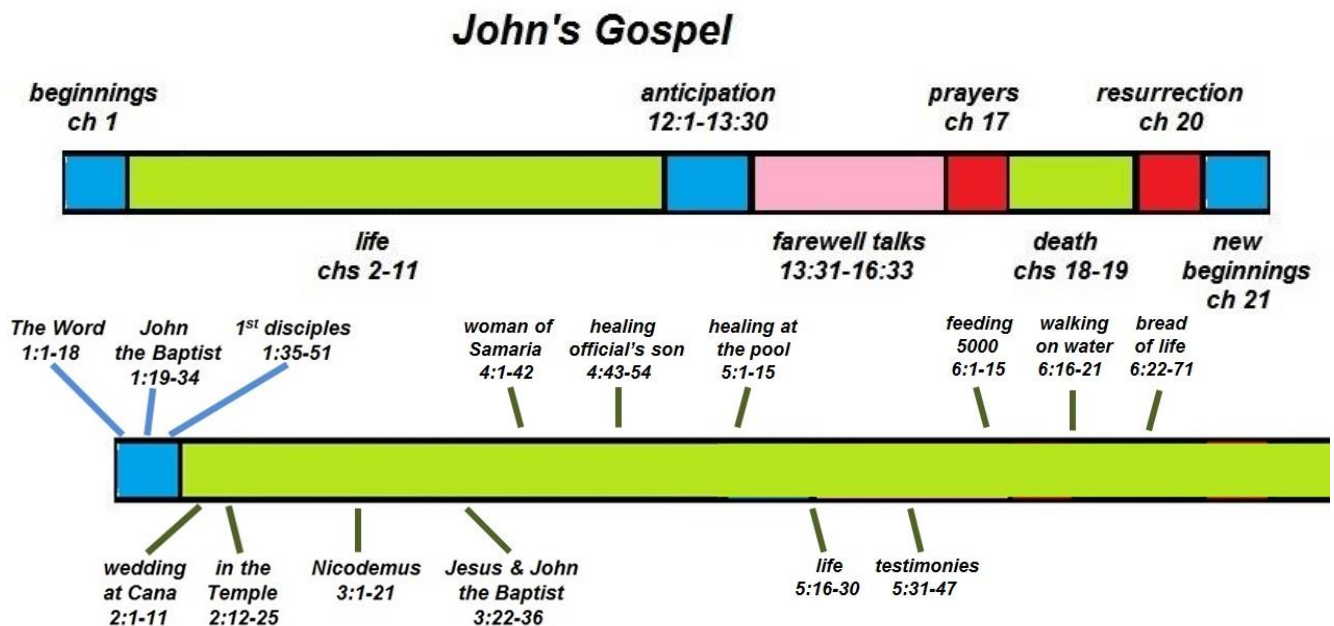
Getting started

1. Can you remember a time when you were criticised?

What happened and how did you handle it?



The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 7:1-11.

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

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

The light ceremony involved the lighting of chandeliers or lanterns so that all Jerusalem seemed to be bathed in the light from the temple. All of this of course occurred at the Temple, a place of major significance for the Jewish people.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 15 by Bill Salier

- (a) Why do you think Jesus' brothers suggested that he go public (vv 3-4) and yet they didn't believe in him (v 5)?

(b) Why do you think Jesus goes to Jerusalem in secret (v 10)?

3. Read Mark 3:20-35, Luke 14:25-27, 18:28-30.
What do you make of Jesus' relationship with his family?

You do not hear this fact in churches very much, but Jesus' family thought he was mad, and they tried to stop him: 'When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind"' (Mark 3:21).

This is another tick to the credibility of the Gospels: such a fact would have been very embarrassing to the early church, and yet they kept it in, so we are undoubtedly dealing with a true story here. It is easy to understand the family's point of view. Jesus was attracting the attention of both the religious and the Herodian civil authorities. He was a hero to the poor and the marginalised . . .

Whether or not his family agreed with the accusations of madness, they certainly agreed that he needed to be restrained. The word Mark uses here, *krateo*, is the word for taking control of someone, by force if necessary. It is the same word used elsewhere by Mark to describe those who want to arrest Jesus. It's a family arrest.

The arrival of his family indicates that Jesus is still in the southwest part of Galilee, perhaps at Nain or Magdala. Close to Nazareth, anyway, and the family have an opportunity to take charge of him. But they have two difficulties. The first is the sheer weight of numbers. They cannot get to him because of the crowd (Luke 8:19). The second is that he refuses to let them in anyway.

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you: And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother. (Mark 3:31-35)

For Jesus' first audiences, it is one of those sharp-intake-of-breath moments. To treat your family this way was outrageous. Jesus' family — his mother, especially — should have been accorded an honoured passage through the crowd. They should have been VIPs. At the top of the guest list. Instead Jesus makes them wait outside, and he uses them to make a point. He gestures at his disciples — and clearly they are male and female — and says 'You are my family, my sisters and brothers.'

The language of family conflict is found several times in Jesus' teaching. He tells his followers, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life' (Luke 18:29-30). Again, 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26).

'Hate' is hyperbole. The point is that Jesus was aware of how the family or clan was a tie that bound people — for good and bad. He was not anti-family. His followers clearly had families. He lived with them and helped them. But in a society where everything was defined by the kinship structure, Jesus was suggesting a radical break with tradition.

The fact is that, throughout his campaigns, Jesus' family did not really understand what he was doing. His mother is with Jesus at the cross, but his brothers clearly are not (and we shall soon see them in conflict again). . . .

John gives us another story of dissension among Jesus' family, a story which must have taken place just before Jesus left Galilee for Samaria. The incident took place in the autumn of AD 32. We know that Jesus' brothers were not among his disciples; they certainly were not present at the crucifixion. But they may have been with him at this time, on the first stage of his tour in south Galilee/Samaria, because they were going up to Jerusalem for the festival. The natural route from Capernaum to Samaria would take Jesus towards Sepphoris and past Nazareth where his family lived. Naturally then, Jesus' brothers would join his group, as their route lay in the same direction. They were all going south. This may be why the Samaritans reacted so strongly. Jesus' party contained pilgrims. It contained, specifically, his brothers.

Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.' (For not even his brothers believed in him.) (John 7:2-5)

It is the old temptation. Show what you can do. Only they do not really believe that he will. And Jesus refuses. He tells them to 'go themselves' if they want to. 'My time has not yet fully come' (John 7:8). So his brothers set off without him.

Then Jesus abruptly changes his mind: 'After his brothers had gone to the festival, then [Jesus] also went, not publicly but as it were in secret' (John 7:10).

Once again, none of the disciples feature in the episode as recounted in John's Gospel. The implication is that, just as he had at the festival in winter AD 31, Jesus takes the opportunity to go to Jerusalem, while they are off evangelising.

John's picture of Jerusalem is of a city abuzz with rumour. The crowd is alive with argument and speculation about Jesus. Some say he is a good man, others that he is 'deceiving the crowd'. There is, however, no open discussion of Jesus, 'for fear of the Jews' (John 7:13). It is a scene out of a modern dictatorship. The streets of Burma or Iran. Is the people's champion going to show his face? And is he really their champion, or just another failed wannabe king? Or worse, a government stooge?

Worryingly, the Jewish authorities are already expecting Jesus. They are on the lookout, saying, 'Where is he?' How did they know he was coming? It has been nine months, perhaps a year, since he last showed his face in Jerusalem. Most of that time he has spent up north, some of it even outside Galilee. Two major festivals — Passover and Pentecost — have passed without him appearing. The crowd's fervour may have been stoked by stories of the feeding of the five thousand. But the worrying suspicion is that somehow this is linked with Jesus' brothers urging him to go to Jerusalem. Had they told the authorities that Jesus would be there? After all, considering that they did not believe in him, they were very keen for him to act in a very public way. This might sound like sacrilege — especially since at least one of his brothers was a leader of the Jerusalem church — but even we accept that Jesus' brother Jude authored the letter which bears his name, that still leaves two brothers unaccounted for. Two brothers who, for all we know, never followed Jesus, never believed their brother was anything other than a madman. It is a disturbing thought, perhaps, but maybe Judas was not the only mole in the camp.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 142-191.

4. Read John 7:12-31.

(a) What are the different reactions to Jesus?

(b) How does Jesus defend himself?

5. Read John 7:32-52.

(a) What are the different reactions to Jesus in this section?

(b) What is the answer to the question in verse 36?

(c) What is the connection between "streams of living water", Jesus and the Spirit (vv 38-39)?

(d) (i) How provocative are Jesus' actions here?

(ii) How do they interact with the symbolism of the water pouring ceremony (see also Isaiah 12:16; Zech 14:1-8; Ezek 36:25-27)?

(iii) What is being claimed here by Jesus in this action?

(d) How far has Nicodemus come (see also John 3:1-10)?

To finish

6. Is criticism good or bad? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Why are Christians more prepared to criticise other Christians but not the minister?
8. Are we judging people if we criticise them?



9. How would you apply the Gospel's teaching on Jesus and water to today? See Jeremiah 2:13.
10. (a) What has been helpful in this chapter in thinking through how to approach people and their (mis)conceptions about the person of Jesus?
- (b) The chapter has mainly focussed around the claim that Jesus is the Christ. What does this title mean and is it relevant for today?
- (c) The chapter has breathed the air of argument and sort of proof in discussion about Jesus. Some Christians are nervous about this suggesting that our responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel and not argue for it. How would you respond to that?

Study 8, John ch 8, the woman caught in adultery

Getting started

1. Which of these rules should we obey?
 - (a) A woman must wear a hat at church.
 - (b) Eat 3 meals a day.
 - (c) Don't lie.
 - (d) Go to church every week.
 - (e) Don't work on Sundays.
 - (f) Give away 10% of your income.
 - (g) Pray every day.
 - (h) Keep your promises.
 - (i) Love your neighbour as yourself.



Bible

2. Read John 8:1-11.
 - (a) Is Jesus ignoring the Law (see also John 18:31)?
 - (b) What does this passage say about Jesus?

There is a puzzle about this story. It doesn't really seem to fit here. Chapters 7 and 8 – omitting this passage – seem to flow on reasonably well. And, tellingly, the earliest copies of John's gospel do in fact run straight on from 7:52 to 8:12, missing this story out altogether. At the same time, some manuscripts put it in, but in a different place. Some have it as an extra story after the end of the gospel. Some even place it in Luke's gospel (and it has to be said that the way the story is told is, if anything, more like Luke than like John). That's why some translations of the Bible put the story in brackets, or add it to the end as an 'appendix'.

At the same time, there is something to be said for reading it here, where a lot of manuscripts do have it. John 7 has Jesus teaching in the Temple during the festival of Tabernacles, and the crowds and authorities getting increasingly interested in asking who he is and what he's about. John 8 has an altogether darker tone, with Jesus accusing the Judeans of wilfully misunderstanding him, failing to grasp what he's doing, and wanting to kill him, because they are following the dictates of 'their father, the devil'. Chapter 8 contains some of the harshest things Jesus is ever recorded as saying. . . .

The chapter fits, in other words, with a change of mood brought on by something which has caught Jesus' attention, and has made him realize just how steeped in their own patterns of thinking his Judaeans contemporaries had become – and how devastatingly unlike God's patterns of thinking they were. So, whether or not the story of the woman and her accusers originally belonged here, it certainly helps us to understand the chapter which it now introduces. The chapter as it now stands begins with people wanting to stone a woman to death; it ends with them wanting to stone Jesus. Perhaps that, too, is trying to tell us something.

From John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 by Tom Wright pp 111-112.

Scholars are agreed that this section did not originally form part of St. John's Gospel, though it records a genuine incident in the life of Jesus. Not only does the overwhelming majority of ancient Greek mss omit it at this point, but many of the later mss which include it here mark it with asterisks denoting that there was doubt about its position. One group of mss, moreover, inserts it after Luke xxi. 38; one ms has it after John vii. 36; and

a few others after John xxi. 24. All this evidence suggests that scribes were often ignorant of its exact position, though anxious to retain it as part of the four Gospels.

From the Tyndale Commentary John p 110 by R.V.G.Tasker.

In the febrile, heady religious atmosphere, Jesus was not the only person under threat of stoning. In most Bibles you will find a story at this point about a woman caught in adultery. It is not in the earliest manuscripts of John's Gospel and is written in a different style. It is possible that it comes from a now-lost gospel, the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. The few fragments we have from this lost gospel include a slightly different version of the Lord's Prayer and an account of Jesus' resurrection appearance to his brother James. Papias, writing around AD 130, wrote, according to Eusebius, of 'a story about a woman accused falsely of many sins before the lord, which the Gospel of [the] Hebrews contains'. So this story may originate from a different Gospel.

It certainly fits into the general atmosphere of the city at the time. Technically only the Romans had the right to execute people, but one doubts the Romans would worry about a Jewish woman being stoned by a mob. In the end, Jesus completely undermines their self-righteous fury and they slink away. But the woman, the sinner, is told to go and 'sin no more'.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 195-196.

Video

The Nooma video, #23, Corner, by Rob Bell, is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In this video Rob Bell talks about acts of grace like Jesus' act of grace in letting off the woman caught in adultery.

3. (a) What was the main point of the video?



- (b) Was there anything you didn't understand in the video?

- (c) Why is "Corner" the title of the video?

- (d) Read Deut 24:19-22.

Context: God's people had escaped from Egypt by crossing the Red Sea and were making their way through the wilderness to get to the Promised Land, Palestine. In Deuteronomy God tells his people what it will be like in the Promised Land and how they are to live there as his people.

From v 22, what is the connection between leaving stuff for the poor and being slaves in Egypt?

- (e) Have you ever been given a chair?

- (f) Have you ever been given something you really valued at the time but later it didn't seem to matter so much?

- (g) What point did Rob Bell make about the chair that his grandmother gave him?

- (h) What should think about when we give something to someone who needs it?

(i) What are the dangers of success, what are the dangers of *not* giving, what are the dangers of *not* leaving a corner for someone else?

May you find somebody who needs what you have
only to discover
that they had
what you needed all along.

4. (a) What does it mean to have faith in science?

(b) What does it mean to have faith in progress?

(c) What does it mean to have faith in politicians?

(d) What does it mean to have faith in TV presenters?

(e) What does it mean to have faith in the Church?

(f) Have you lost faith in any of those 5 above? If so, why?

(g) How does our faith in Jesus compare with faith we may or may not have in science or progress or politicians or TV presenters or the Church?

5. I'm going to play a song by Sting called "If I Ever Lose my Faith in You" which refers to some of the things we have already thought about concerning faith.

Play StingIfIeverLoseMyFaithInYouSHORTER.mp3.

You could say I lost my faith in science and progress
You could say I lost my belief in the holy church
You could say I lost my sense of direction
You could say all of this and worse but

If I ever lose my faith in you
There'd be nothing left for me to do

Some would say I was a lost man in a lost world
You could say I lost my faith in the people on TV
You could say I'd lost my belief in our politicians
They all seemed like game show hosts to me

If I ever lose my faith in you
There'd be nothing left for me to do

I could be lost inside their lies without a trace
But every time I close my eyes I see your face

I never saw no miracle of science

That didn't go from a blessing to a curse
 I never saw no military solution
 That didn't always end up as something worse but
 Let me say this first

If I ever lose my faith in you
 There'd be nothing left for me to do

(a) What does Sting mean by faith?

(b) What does Sting mean by the possibility of losing faith in his wife (presumably)?

(c) Sting's faith in his wife is so all encompassing that if he lost it there would be nothing left for him to do. Is our faith in Jesus like that?

6. Read John 8:12.

(a) What does it mean to walk in darkness?

(b) How likely is it that you would never walk in darkness?

(c) What kind of faith would you need to follow someone who said you would never walk in darkness?

(d) Why would you follow someone who said this?

7. Read John 8:12-30.

(a) In your own words what is the challenge (v 13) that the Pharisees make on Jesus?

(b) How does Jesus answer that challenge?

(c) Jesus bases his arguments on his relationship with his Father rather than the Law.

(i) What does this say about the Law (see also the previous passage vv 1-11)?

(ii) How does Jesus bring the Law into his argument?

(iii) Christians are "in Christ" so how are we to relate to the Law?

8. Read again John 8:30.
Why would they put their faith in Jesus?

9. Read John 8:31-59.
 - (a) Jesus says that if we know the truth the truth will set us free (vv 31-32).
What are some of the things Jesus could mean by this?

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

 - (c) Make notes on how the argument progresses through this section.

 - (d) What happens to the Jews who believe Jesus in v 31 but want to kill him in v 59?

 - (e) How would Jesus have felt during the argument?

 - (f) How would the Jews have felt during the argument?

 - (g) Why is Jesus' final comment (v 58) so provocative for the Jews?

To finish

10. From John chapter 8, or otherwise, what things prevent people from believing in Jesus?

Study 9, John ch 9, healing a man born blind

Getting started

1. What do people do if they don't want something to be true?



2. Describe your most vivid childhood memory involving darkness?

Bible

3. Read John ch 9.
(a) The disciples ask Jesus a theological question. What don't they ask him, that they may have asked based on their knowledge of what he can do?

(b) What lies behind the disciples' opening question in verse 2? What Bible passages suggest there is no direct link between individual sins and individual experiences of suffering (e.g. Job, Luke 13:1-5)?

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

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 17 by Mark Wormell.

- (c) What is the Pharisees' dilemma (v 16)?

- (d) What are the Pharisees trying to do?

- (e) What are the blind man's parents trying to do (vv 18-23)?

(f) What is Jesus trying to do?

(g) Why would the blind man think his healer was a prophet (v 17)?

(h) Why was it bad to be thrown out of the synagogue (vv 22 & 34)?



Son of Man. In Hebrew or Aramaic, this simply means 'mortal', or 'human being'. . . In the New Testament the phrase is frequently linked to Dan 7:13 where 'one like a son of man' . . . is vindicated after a period of suffering, and is given kingly power.

From John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1-10 by Tom Wright p 178.

When Jesus speaks of himself as "Son of Man" [in Mark 2:10 and 28] nobody reacts to this like "Wow, you are the Daniel 7 Son of Man!" No-one asks which kind of son of man do you mean? Jesus uses "Son of Man" because of its ambiguity. Jesus keeps his identity of Messiah secret because the people have such expectations of the Messiah that this could subvert his program.

From talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University July 2014 (3.4 & GC2.1.6).

(i) Which meaning for "son of man" is Jesus referring to in vv 35-38?

But why the mud [vv 6, 11, 14, 15]? Jesus could quite easily have healed the man with a word, as he did so spectacularly with the official's son a few chapters earlier. So why the rigmarole with the saliva and the mud?

We get our first hint well into the chapter when John happens to mention in passing, "Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes" (v. 14). And in the ensuing Jewish interrogations of the formerly blind man, the exact manner of the healing and its implications for Sabbath-breaking are a constant issue. The Jews keep asking the ex-blind man how Jesus did it and the ex-blind man keeps hedging his answers.

So the thought begins to form in the reader's mind: is it possible that Jesus deliberately made the mud (which would be construed as Sabbath-breaking) to provoke the Pharisees? He could so easily have avoided offending them either by healing without making mud, or by coming back and making mud the next day. Was he trying to wind them up? And if so, why would he do this?

The answer comes in Jesus' final conversation with the ex-blind man where he summarizes the meaning of the sign he has performed: "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind" (v. 39).

Jesus' mission was not only to save and rescue and heal and restore, but also to expose and divide and harden. He came to give sight, but also to give blindness. His parables and teachings and miraculous signs all had this twin effect. For those who had ears to hear – or, in this case, eyes to see – his words were the words of eternal life; for those who closed their eyes and stopped their ears, the ministry of Jesus only pushed them

further into hardness of heart and unbelief. They thought they were sitting in judgement of Jesus and his message. But in reality, the judgement was all running in the opposite direction.

From "Here's mud in your eye!" by Tony Payne from The Briefing #350 November 2007.



(j) In what ways is Jesus 'the Light of the World' (e.g. as the Word who created everything, he affirms the goodness of creation (including sight), he brings spiritual light, he destroys darkness)?

(k) What attitudes to sin are displayed by the disciples, the Pharisees and Jesus in this passage?

To finish

4. (a) How hard is it to change your mind about something?

(b) What needs to happen for you to change your mind?

(c) Does this make it any easier to understand the Pharisees?

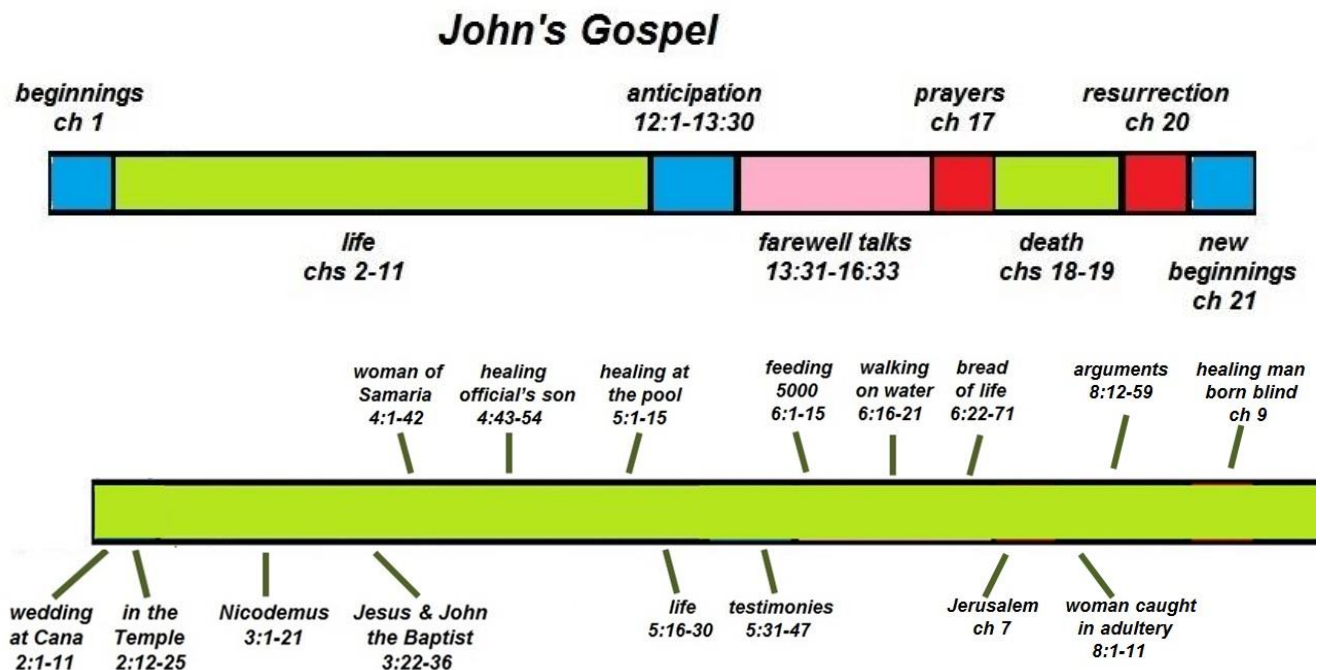
Study 10, John ch 10, the good shepherd

Getting started

1. (a) Who was your favourite teacher at school?
- (b) What set them apart from the other teachers?
- (c) What qualities does someone need to have to be a good leader?



The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 10:1-13.

Jesus' imagery would have been familiar in a society where **sheep-farming** was a staple of the economy. The 'fold' or pen was probably a large, communal enclosure where several flocks were herded for safety at night. The calling of the sheep in the morning (3) would be crucial as each shepherd assembled his own flock from the larger herd in the fold. During the night a guard would be hired (3, the watchman). He would remain at the only door to the enclosure. Robbers could enter only by scaling the enclosure. The guard would admit only the true shepherds by the door when they arrived in the morning.

From The Message of John by Bruce Milne p 145.

What does Jesus mean when he claims "I am the gate" (vv 7, 9)?

3. Who is Jesus talking to in . . .

John 9:40?

John 10:6?

John 10:19?

4. What are false shepherds / hired hands like?

5. What is Jesus implying about their leadership?

6. What might 'life to the full' mean (v 10)?

7. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16.
(a) Who are the shepherds?

(b) What does God promise to do?

8. Read John 10:14-33.

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

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 19 by Mark Wormell.

Who is Jesus claiming to be?

9. How does Jesus back up his claims (v25)?

10. What are the characteristics of Jesus in . . .

Vv 11-13?

Vv 14-16?

Vv 27-28?

11. What are the characteristics of Jesus' people in . . .

Vv 3-4?

V 14?

12. Describe the relationship between the Good Shepherd and his sheep?
13. Who are the 'other sheep' in v16 (see also John 11:49-53)?
14. What do we learn about Jesus' death from vv 17-18?
15. Are there any bad shepherds today? How can you spot them?
16. (a) What does Jesus imply when he links 'listening' to his voice and receiving eternal life (see vv 27-28 and John 3:16)?

(b) How and when do you listen to Christ's voice (vv 3, 5, 16, 27)?
17. Jesus says that the ones who listen to his voice will receive eternal life and will never perish. No one can be snatched from his Father's hand. This fits well with John 6:37-40 and 17:2. But how does this sit with Matthew 13:21, John 15:6 and 16:1, Hebrews 6:6, and your own experience of people who seemed to be Christian 'falling away'?
18. Read John 10:34-42.
What is Christ saying about himself and God the Father (vv 36-38)?

Extra note on John 10:34-35

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

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

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

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

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 19 by Mark Wormell.

Video

The Nooma video, #10, Lump, by Rob Bell is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. Like the security of having Jesus as our shepherd Rob Bell talks about security and assurance in this video.

19. What are your first impressions of this video?



20. Why did the boy hide under the bed covers?

21. How does the father handle the situation?

22. In the video Rob Bell says "there's a moment when our junk catches up with us, when our sins catch up with us and sometimes it's easier to run upstairs than face the truth."

(a) What does he mean by that?

(b) How does God's love for us help in that situation?

(c) What still needs to be resolved?

23. How does this video relate to the question of our security once we become a Christian?

24. Rob Bell repeats this phrase a number of times: "Nothing we can ever do could make God love us less." Read Rom 8:31-39.

Context: Paul explains the gospel in the first 7 chapters. In chs 5-8 he writes about freedom from the wrath of God, freedom from the power of sin, freedom from the law and freedom from death. Paul begins to write about the Holy Spirit in chapter 8 and how he helps us live in between being saved and finally being glorified.

To finish

25. In what sense do you lead other people?
26. Which of Jesus' qualities can we adopt in leading others?



Study 11, John ch 11, Lazarus

Getting started

1. What is the most memorable funeral you've ever been to? Did it change you?

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

Bible

2. Read John 11:1-16.

How does Jesus respond to the news of his friend's sickness?

3. Why does Jesus delay? What purpose does he see in it (vv 4, 15 and see John 7:6)?

4. (a) Can you think of a time when God's timing was different from yours?

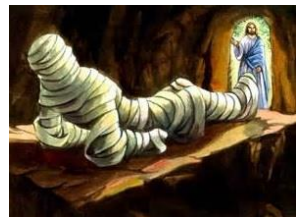
(b) How did you respond / what did you learn?

5. What does Christ mean in vv 9-10?

6. Read John 11:17-45.

Knowing what was about to happen, why did Jesus weep (vv 28-39)?

7. How does Jesus show the glory of God (v40)?



8. Who does Jesus declare himself to be?

9. What promises does he make?

10. How would you explain vv 25-26 to someone who has never heard of Jesus?
11. How does this affect the way you feel about your own death?
12. Mary struggles with Jesus' absence in her time of need (verse 32), and the crowd wonders why Jesus didn't prevent him from dying (verse 37). We often struggle to understand why God seems to sit back while terrible things happen to those we love.



The circle above represents the world and the emojis represent our experiences of the world involving goodness and evil.

But what role does God play? Each box below represents a possible explanation for how God fits in with this broken and divided world.

- (a) Suggest theories for how each box explains God's role in the world (even if you don't agree).
 (b) What are the strengths or weaknesses of each theory from a Biblical perspective?
 (c) Which one(s) do you find most likely?



Theory?

Strengths &
weaknesses?

Most likely?

**Emoji**

[No emoji]

Meaning

There is no god (atheism*), and/or evil is an illusion based on our desires or attachments (Buddhism*).

"In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." (Richard Dawkins, River Out of Eden)

Strengths & Weaknesses

This explains the random nature of our experience – some things are good, other things are bad, and there is no rhyme or reason to it.

However, it does not adequately explain the moral dimension which is inherently part of our experience of the world (i.e., it fails to explain the outrage of evil). Biblically, evil is much more than just 'something I don't enjoy', and we rightly cry out for justice (Ps 13:1-2).

**Emoji****Meaning**

God is evil.

Or God is angry (Islam*), and our suffering is not evil but actually according to his will, e.g. as proper punishment.

Strengths & Weaknesses

This explains the bad things in the world, but it doesn't account for the good things we receive from him. Biblically, we know that God has gone to great lengths to bring humanity back to himself. It wouldn't make sense for him to do this if he is evil.

On the other hand, the idea that God is punishing us is half true – the suffering we experience is partly a result of God's judgment on this world. But much of the suffering in the world is disproportionate, with the poor suffering more than the rich (Psalm 73, Luke 13:2).

**Emoji****Meaning**

God is horrified by evil but he is not in control, or is otherwise unable to do prevent it (this is close to some types of Open Theism*).

Strengths & Weaknesses

This explains how God can be good but the world still be such a mess.

However, it cannot be reconciled with the demonstration of God's power in creating the world (or indeed Jesus' power over suffering in John 11:37)

**Emoji****Meaning**

There are multiple gods (polytheistic religions*) or good and evil are rival forces (dualism*).

Strengths & Weaknesses

This explains the mix of good and evil, but it also makes evil 'natural', and gives little reason to hope that good will win over chaos in the end. It is incompatible with the biblical one God (Ps 96:5) who created the world good (Gen 1).

**Emoji****Meaning**

God is good so he mourns over evil and suffering, but has good reasons for allowing evil to continue for the moment. These reasons are partly revealed to us, but he also knows things we don't know.

Strengths & Weaknesses

This explains the incongruity of a good world marred by evil – while all the other explanations are 'stable' (i.e. the world just is the way we should expect it to be) this one is 'unstable' (things cannot stay how they are now). God has experienced suffering in this world, and mourns over it.

While we have helpful clues as to what God is doing in the world (c.f. the fall, patience in judgment, the cross, the kingdom to come, etc.) the hard thing about this view is that it requires us to trust God with what we don't know.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 20 by Andrew Judd.

[T]he household consisted of Lazarus — the head of the household — and his two sisters. And that all three were young and unmarried, and both parents were dead. This is a family of single people.

In this reconstruction, Lazarus would be the sole provider for the household. They may not have been poor — evidently the house had enough room for Jesus and his followers, not to mention their possessing a large, expensive bottle of perfume. But the girls were in a perilous position. If Lazarus died, the girls were in danger of being disinherited. Torah law about inheritance protected daughters but not sisters: '[If a man dies, and] has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it' (Num. 27:8-11).

What wealth they had would have passed to their uncle or to the nearest male relative. So the death of their brother has huge implications for the sisters. No wonder they were so desperate for Jesus to come to them. This catastrophe meant not just the loss of a beloved brother, but the loss of house, money and status. If women were second-class citizens, unmarried women were third class.

So Jesus and his followers went up to Bethany, and there, in the graveyard just outside the village, Jesus did what he had done in Galilee: he raised Lazarus to life. Before that, however, he asks Martha a question. He gives the last of John's famous 'I am' sayings: 'I am the resurrection and the life.' And then he asks Martha a question: 'Do you believe this?' (John 11:25-26).

It is a question we have encountered before, in Caesarea Philippi, surrounded by the temples of the various gods, when he asked his disciples, 'Who do you say I am?' Now Jesus allows Martha to answer the same question. He is, by implication, including her in the disciples. Martha, who complained about Mary acting the part, gets to answer the same question as any other disciple, and she answers the same way: 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' She is right up there with Peter, this girl.

Jesus calls Mary and then they go to the tomb. And there, Jesus weeps. Indeed, the whole passage is full of agitation. The Greek implies that Jesus gets progressively more moved. Most translations describe Jesus as 'greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved' (John 11:33), but there is more here. The word 'indicates an outburst of anger', writes one expert, 'and any attempt to reinterpret it in terms of an internal emotional upset caused by grief, pain, or sympathy is illegitimate'.

The anger and frustration grows in him until he bursts into tears. It is a stunning moment: one of the few times in the Gospels when we see Jesus distraught. Even in his frustrations with his disciples, his anger with the Pharisees and the scribes, even during the intense pressure brought on by the attention of the crowds, there is nothing like this sense of breakdown, of emotional release.

Why the tears? Not, surely, for Lazarus, although that is how the onlookers perceived it. And not, as many commentators have rather smugly suggested, because of the lack of faith of the women. How on earth were they to know what Jesus was going to do? No, Jesus is angry because the whole situation is appalling. Something is so wrong about this.

Although this is the most extreme example, we see this kind of feeling many times in Jesus' mission. When Jesus sees the harassed, exhausted crowd, when he sees the leper excluded from society, when he is greeted by blind men, when he sees the widow in Nain mourning the loss of her only son, when he drives out the demon at the foot of the mountain, the Gospels use the rather wonderful Greek word *splanchnizomai*. This is translated as 'to have pity, show mercy, feel sympathy'. But the root of it comes from *splanchnon*, which meant the 'inward parts' or 'entrails' of an animal or even a human (when Judas dies, his bowels — his *splanchna* — burst out). The English words do not capture the gut-wrenching nature of Jesus' feelings. He is gutted. He is stomach-wrenchingly moved. Bland English translations fail to capture this about Jesus: he felt things incredibly deeply, viscerally. Here, in Bethany, faced with the grief, the hopelessness, the despair, Jesus weeps. The whole situation stinks.

Unlike Lazarus. For when Jesus comes to the tomb — again 'greatly disturbed' — and the stone is rolled away, there is no stench. Which is why, at that moment, Jesus prays a prayer of thanks: he knows his prayer has been answered. Another command: 'Lazarus, come out!' And Lazarus staggers, shuffles, somehow makes it to the entrance of the tomb.

John describes his appearance in detail: his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, his face wrapped (John 11:44). Lazarus would have been placed on a long, wide strip of linen, with his feet at one end. The cloth would then have been drawn over his head, wrapping him end to end. The feet would have been bound at the ankles, and the arms secured to the body with linen strips. The jaw was bound to stop it falling away from the face during decomposition. Walking would have been incredibly difficult. But if you are in a tomb and you wake up, I doubt you worry too much about keeping your dignity on the way out.

Wealthier Jews did not cover the face, because they could afford necessary embalming. Poorer Jews tended to cover the face because the skin would go back and it was thought shameful. Perhaps this indicates that the family were not that rich. Enough money to bury Lazarus properly, but not enough to embalm him. It

certainly explains why Martha thinks he might stink. They simply did not have the money to have him anointed with spices and expensively embalmed.

The raising of Lazarus, for all its miraculous nature, had some down-to-earth consequences. Jesus' disciples had been right to be wary about returning to the Jerusalem region so soon. There were Jews there from nearby Jerusalem — and they went back and reported the incident to the Pharisees who, in turn, took it to the council, the Sanhedrin.

They took it to Caiaphas, the high priest.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 210-213.

13. Read John 11:46-57.
How did the religious leaders respond to this miracle? Why?

14. In what way are the High Priest's words truer than he realised?

15. What does this teach you about God?

To finish

16. What comforts are there in this passage for people who suffer and trust in Christ?

17. How would respond to someone who said: "I'll believe in Jesus if I see a miracle."?

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

Study 12, John ch 12

Getting started

1. When you know something is going to happen soon how do you cope with the waiting?



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

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

Bible

2. Read John 12:1-11.
 - (a) How do you think Mary felt about Jesus (see also Luke 10:38-42)?
 - (b) Was Judas right in wanting the money given to the poor (v 5)? Why/why not?
 - (c) Is Jesus an easy-going, live-and-let-live sort of bloke? Why/why not?
 - (d) What does this passage say about the chief priests?
3. Read John 12:12-19.
 - (a) What are the crowds saying about Jesus?
 - (b) What might the crowds be hoping for?

Early on the Sunday, Jesus sent two unnamed disciples to fetch a colt from the village (Mark 11:1-6). There is nothing in the Gospel text to indicate that this was some kind of miraculous provision. In fact it was all part of a prearranged plan, organised either the night before, or in that surreptitious visit to Jerusalem in the winter of AD 32. The disciples even have code words to indicate to its owner who needs the colt.

Once Jesus mounted the colt — probably near the crossroads on the main Jericho—Jerusalem road, where the road to Bethphage goes off to the south — he was ready. Time to make the grand entrance, over the Mount of Olives, cresting the hill and then down into the Kidron valley and a sea of people. It was Passover, and everywhere there were pilgrims sleeping in tents, under makeshift shelters, or wherever they could. No wonder the excitement catches, like a spark to the dry grass: soon there is a mass of followers, cheering, shouting, caught up in the moment, waving branches and joining in the chanting.

Throughout his campaigns in Galilee and Samaria, Jesus avoided making overt statements about his messianic status. Not so now. Nothing Jesus ever says is more of a signal than this donkey ride into Jerusalem. Jesus is using the symbolic vocabulary of Zechariah: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey' (Zech. 9:9).

It is his clearest statement yet of his messianic credentials. 'I am the king' is the message, and the people respond. Greeting him according to a custom usually associated with royalty, they throw their cloaks on the ground. But Jesus is giving out other messages as well. Because, as Jesus was entering Jerusalem, another procession was taking place on the other side of the city.

Pilate lived in Caesarea, not in Jerusalem. A week before each major festival he came into Jerusalem, both to authorise the handing over of the ceremonial vestments and to ensure that order was kept. The festivals were, in Josephus's words, 'the usual occasion for sedition to flare up', so it was important for Pilate to be present. Accompanied by his retinue, his family and, of course, extra troops, he would have entered on the other side of the city, along the road from Joppa (past the crucifixion site and burial ground), and towards the former Palace of Herod the Great, the most splendid building in Jerusalem and Pilate's headquarters for his visits.

Two processions, then. One from the east, tumbling down the Mount of Olives, wild with cheering and rich with messianic symbolism. The other coming from the west, but just as symbolic: gleaming armour and burnished leather, cavalrymen on horseback and the imperial eagle leading the way. From the west comes the kingdom of the world; from the east comes the kingdom of God.

Jesus' entry to Jerusalem was not only a statement of his messianic claim. It was also a politically charged act, a two-fingered salute to the empire, the world and the Gentile ways of power.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 226-227.

4. Read John 12:20-36.

(a) What is Jesus anticipating?

(b) How will the crowd's dilemma in v 34 be reconciled?

(c) How are the expectations in this passage so different from the crowd's expectations in the previous passage?

5. Read John 12:37-50.

(a) Why have some people believed in Jesus?

(b) Why have some people not believed in Jesus?

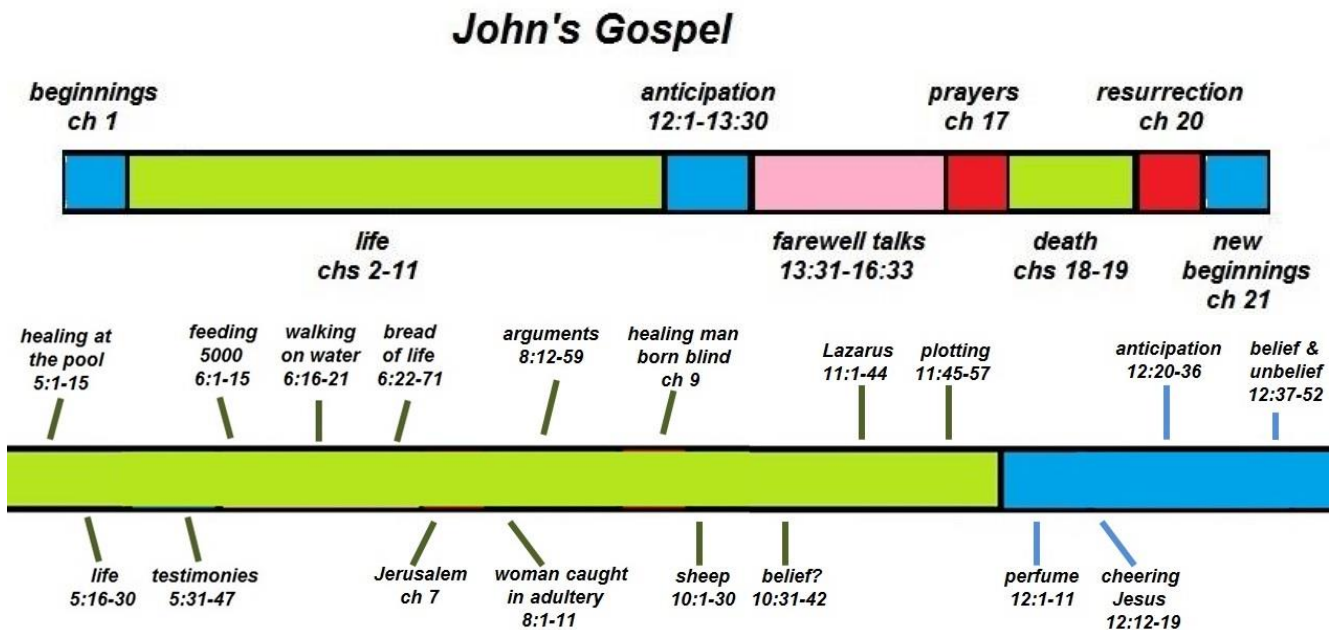
(c) What is the major problem for the believers in this passage?

Study 13, John ch 13, foot washing

Getting started

1. On a small piece of paper write the household chore you most dislike doing.
2. Put the pieces of paper in a bowl and take turns in picking one out and guessing whose it is.

The story so far . . .



Bible

3. Read John 13:1-5.
What's about to happen to Jesus and how do you think he might have been feeling (vv 1-3)?
4. Why do you think Jesus washed the disciples' feet? What was he trying to teach them (see Luke 22:24-27 for more background)?
5. What do we learn about Jesus?
6. Read John 13:6-11.
What was wrong with Peter's reaction?
7. What will the disciples come to understand later (v7)?



8. So what does Jesus mean when he says “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me”? What must we be cleansed from?
9. Read John 13:12-17.
What do you think is the key verse in this section?
10. What do you learn about following Jesus? Does Jesus really mean we should wash each other’s feet?
11. What lowly tasks do you struggle to do? What does this tell you about yourself?
12. What opportunities do you have to serve others like this?
13. What does this passage mean for what we should expect of our church leaders?

14. Video

The Nooma video, #22, Tomato, by Rob Bell, is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In each video Rob Bell takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way.

(a) What are your first impressions of this video?



(b) What do you think is the main point of the video?

(c) What point does Rob Bell make about the image of ourselves that we try to project to people?

Most of Rob Bell’s videos have a story going on in the background while Rob Bell is talking. This video has Rob Bell talking to us in his kitchen with occasional clips of other scenes of people doing various things. In each of these clips there is a bloke with a pink umbrella interacting with someone else. One clip has a lady with shopping bags going into a shop, another clip has a bloke playing a video game on the couch and rings his wife (?) to get him a can of fizzy, another clip is of one kid eating a sandwich and the other kid eating cake, another clip is of a bloke in a newsagent with the umbrella man trying to convince him to buy a magazine, another clip is of a bloke looking at an attractive young lady as he approaches his car and the last clip is of Rob Bell (?) taking his dog for a run with the umbrella man chasing after him.

(d) How does the umbrella man and these short clips relate to what Rob Bell is talking about?



(e) How does this video fit in with John ch 13?

Rob Bell finishes with:

So may you lose your life, and in the process, find it.

May the love of God free you from fear.

And may you trust that Jesus saves.

15. Read John 13:18-30.

(a) Have you ever been betrayed or “stabbed in the back” by someone?

What happened? How did you feel?

(b) How would have Jesus have felt?

Two days to go. The imminence of Passover meant that Jesus had to be arrested soon. Once the festival was over he would be away, out of their reach. But Jesus still has protection. The crowd are still on his side and any arrest will cause a riot. They need a plan. They need someone on the inside.

Enter **Judas**.

We do not know much about him. Just his father's name, Simon (John 6:71), and probably the town he came from, Kerioth. (Even that is a bit of a guess. In the Greek, the Gospels spell his identifying name, Iscariot, in ten different forms.) He is a man of mystery, and the greatest mystery of all is, 'Why did he do it?'

We know *what* he did. He did not so much betray Jesus as give away the optimal location for an arrest. Jesus' enemies already had enough to form charges against him. What they needed was a place and time when the arrest could be made.

As to 'why?', there have been many ideas put forward. Perhaps he had grown frustrated at Jesus' rejection of the 'right' way of being the Messiah. So he was trying to force his hand. Jump-start the revolution. Or maybe he was disillusioned. Maybe he had had enough of Jesus' flagrant shattering of social and religious mores. I think, however, that just like most other sordid little betrayals, it was all about money. The disciples, after all, were poor. 'Look, we have left everything and followed you, said Peter (Mark 10:28). And now they were in the richest city in Judea, and all Jesus was doing was telling stories and arguing and getting into trouble. No revolution. No takeover of the temple and the treasury. No seats of honour. It was clear that, despite Jesus' promises of some kind of reward, nothing was going to happen. He might be the Messiah, the Anointed One, but he was doing it all wrong.

And even when he was anointed, he got that wrong as well. . . .

Judas, according to the Gospels, gave back the money and went out and committed suicide. There are two accounts of his death and the only thing they have in common is a place: *Akeldama*, or 'the field of blood'. According to Luke, Judas bought the field with the money he had earned for betraying Jesus. In the field he seems to have exploded: 'falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out' (Acts 1:18). Matthew depicts Judas as bitterly regretting what he had done. When he saw Jesus condemned, he threw the money back into the temple and went and hanged himself. It was, in Matthew's account, the chief priests who took the money and bought the field with it, on the grounds that it was now impure, so could not be returned to the temple. Whatever the case, to ancient readers, Judas's suicide would have been seen as an additional sign of disgrace, rather than being viewed with compassion. Jewish attitudes to suicide were harsher

than in our day. For suicide, one did not mourn openly. A suicide's body was not buried - it was exposed until sunset. He had made, it seemed, a terrible mistake. And no one would even mourn for him.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 240-250.

16. Read John 13:31-38

(a) Where is Jesus going and how will it glorify God?

(b) If Jesus' disciples can't follow him there yet, how are they to live in the mean time?

(c) What can we do to show love for one another?

(d) What barriers exist that make it hard for you to show your love?

(e) How can you overcome these barriers?

(f) What should loving one another result in?

(g) How is your church going at this?

To finish

17. (a) How do we decide whom to serve and whom not to serve?

(b) Do we serve non-Christians? Do we serve them like we serve Christians?

(c) When do we serve ourselves?

18. Serve the person in your group whose chore you selected at the start, by doing the chore for them within the next two weeks.

Study 14, John ch 14, I am the way

Getting started

1. What are the things that worry you most?



Bible

2. Read John 14:1-11.
 - (a) Why are the hearts of the disciples troubled?
 - (b) How does Jesus comfort them?
3. What does Jesus mean about preparing a place for us?
4. Explain verse 6 in your own words.
5. What is Jesus claiming in verses 9-11?
6. Read John 14:12-14.

How did the disciples do even greater things than they saw Jesus doing (v 12)?



The language of '**asking in someone's name**' is the language of diplomacy. It was well known in the first century. When an Australian ambassador speaks at the United Nations, she does not speak in her own name. She does not express her views. She speaks in the name of Australia. She says only what she is authorised to say, or what she knows the Australian government would want her to say. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we may only ask for things that we can anticipate Jesus wanting. For this reason, when we 'pray in Jesus' name', we are not invoking a magical incantation, like 'hocus pocus' or 'abracadabra'. We are simply invoking the right Jesus gives us to ask for things he might want, and to do so on his behalf.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 24 by Mark Wormell.

7. Read John 14:15-31.
Does Jesus ignore Judas' question (v 22)?

If not, what answer does Jesus give?

If so, why does Jesus ignore the question?

8. How should we read Jesus saying that a lack of obedience shows a lack of love (v 24)?

9. What does obedience mean in the Christian faith?

Play parts of Mike Paget's sermon on John ch 17. ObedienceBeingChristianJohn17MPaget.mp3
and ObedienceJohn17MPaget.mp3.

There are passages about **not being afraid** in all four gospels. I think this is often poorly explained. Jesus knows we are sentient beings. We understand cause and effect. He himself was afraid when he prayed to his Father in the garden of Gethsemane. Crucifixion is not a nice way to die. To die for the sins of the world is unimaginable. So, in my view, Jesus is not saying 'you must never be afraid' or 'you fail me and do not have sufficient faith if you are ever afraid'. He is saying, 'do not let your fear get the better of you. Do not let your fear stop you from living out your faith'. And, just as his Father helped him, God will help us through the work of the Holy Spirit.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 25 by Mark Wormell.

10. What is the connection between the prince of the world coming (v 30) and Jesus going?

Video

This Nooma video, #18, is called Name and it goes for about 14 minutes. In this video Rob Bell talks about names and identity. Being "in Christ" says a lot about identity.



11. What follows is a sample of the words on the back of the T-shirts.
 (a) What does each word mean to you? designer suits
 pick-up trucks
 immigrant
 weak
 ashamed
 bankrupt
 (b) What have these names got to do with "identity"?
 (c) What does the bare skin signify?
12. Rob Bell tells the story of Jacob. After wrestling with the angel, the angel asks "What is your name?" Jacob answers "Jacob" (not Esau). (a) Why is this significant?
 (b) How does Rob Bell relate this story about Jacob to us?
13. Rob Bell tells the story about how Jesus tells Peter that he is going to be a leader in his church (John ch 21) and Peter looks to John and says "What about him?" Jesus says don't worry about John, you follow me. How does Rob Bell relate this story to us?
14. What do you think is the take home message from the video?

May you do the hard work to discover your true self.
 May you find your unique path, the one God has for you.
 And in the process, may you find yourself comfortable in your own skin.

To finish

15. What does it mean to be "in Christ" (see Rom 6:3-11, Gal 3:26-28, 2 Cor 5:17)?
16. How would you respond to someone who said "Religion is a personal matter. It's whatever works for you. There are many paths to God. All religions and spiritualities have some of the truth"?

Study 15, John ch 15, vine

Getting started

1. (a) How often do you pray other than when you are at church?
- (b) What do you pray for?

Bible

2. Read John 15:1-17
What is Jesus saying about himself when he says 'I am the vine' (see Psalm 80:7-15, Isaiah 5:1-7, Ezekiel 15:1-8)?



3. Who are the branches?

Within Jewish tradition, the vine was a picture of Israel. God brought a vine out of Egypt, and planted it in the promised land (Ps 80:8-18). It had been ravaged by wild animals and needed protecting and re-establishing. The vineyard of Israel, said Isaiah in ch 5, has borne wild grapes instead of proper ones. Other prophets used the same picture.

Now Jesus is saying that *he* is the 'true vine'. This can only mean that he is, in himself, the true Israel. He is the one on whom God's purposes are now resting. And his followers are members of God's true people – if they belong to him and remain 'in' him. The picture of the vine isn't just a clever illustration from gardening. It is about who Jesus and his people really are, and what is now going to happen to them as a result.

From John for Everyone part 2 chapters 11-21 p 70 by Tom Wright.

4. What relationship between faith and the fruit of faith do we see in Jesus' teaching here?
5. What kind of fruit is Jesus talking about?
6. Why does he want us to bear fruit?
7. What is the key to bearing fruit?
8. What does it look like practically to 'remain in Jesus' love' (v10)?
9. (a) How can you tell if someone loves Jesus?

(b) What is the relationship between love, obedience and joy (vv 9-11)?

10. How are Jesus' disciples cleansed by the word Jesus has spoken (v 3)?
11. Jesus says the way to remain in his love is to obey his commands. Which commands?
12. (a) Does obedience mean keeping all the rules? Why/why not?

(b) What is obedience if it is not rule keeping?

Listen to parts of Mike Paget's sermon on John ch 17. ObedienceBeingChristianJohn17MPaget.mp3 and ObedienceJohn17MPaget.mp3.

13. Who can empower you to live Jesus' way?
14. Read John 15:18-27.
(a) Who or what is "the world" in verses 18-19?

(b) Who is "they" in verses 20-25?

(c) Does the world hate you? Why/why not?

(d) *Should* the world hate you? Why/why not?

To finish

15. Jesus says he will give us whatever we ask in his name (vv 7, 16, see also John 14:12-14, 1 John 5:14-15 and Mark Wormell's comment in the previous study.
(a) Did he mean *anything* we ask for?

(b) What is important about how we ask?

(c) How will this effect what and why you pray?

16. (a) Consider this scenario: St Faiths decides to have a prayer meeting. There is no particular issue to focus on but it is thought that the whole church needs to spend more time in prayer. So a prayer meeting is called on a week night at the church building. Would you go?

(b) If St Faiths had a prayer meeting once a year, every year, would you go?

(c) If St Faiths had a prayer meeting once a month, every month, would you go?

(d) If St Faiths had a prayer meeting once a week, every week, would you go?

Why/why not?

Study 16, John ch 16, Counsellor

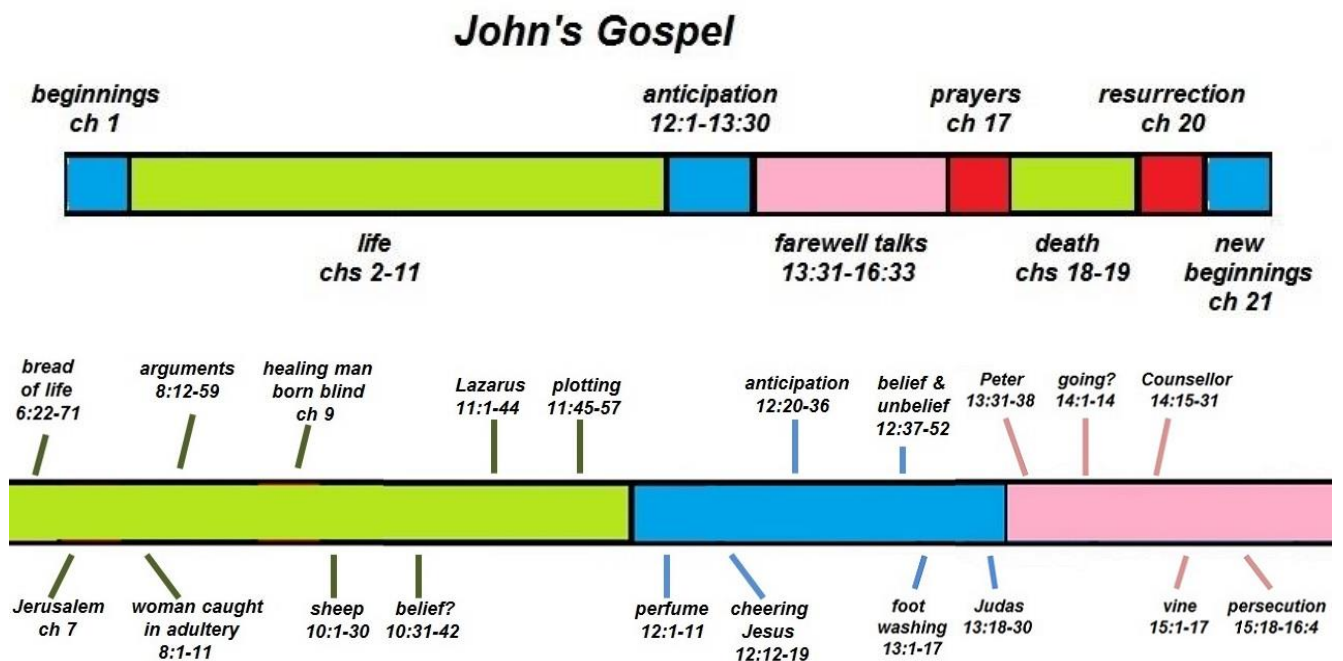
Getting started

1. What do you think of when you hear the words sin?

righteousness?

judgement?

The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 15:26-16:16.

(a) What does Jesus say the Counsellor will do?

(b) How much of what Jesus promises his disciples also applies to us?

(c) Sin relates to not believing in Jesus (v 9), judgement relates to Satan ("the prince of this world") being condemned (v 11) but how does righteousness relate to Jesus going to the Father (v 10)?

(d) Why is (c) so different to our answers to question 1?

(e) Does the Holy Spirit still have the role Jesus describes here?

How does he 'convict the world of guilt' (v 8)?

3. Video

This Nooma video, #14, is called Breathe and it goes for about 14 minutes. In this video Rob Bell gives us a different take on the Holy Spirit.

(a) What are your first impressions of this video?



(b) What do you think is/are the main point(s) of the video?

(c) What might be the connection between what Rob Bell is talking about and riding the underground?

(d) What connections does Rob Bell make between breaths, holy ground, YHWH and the spirit of God?

(e) "When you let God in you become aware of all the things you need to leave behind or let go of. . . . Is there anything you need right now to breathe out?"

(f) "The divine breath is flowing through you and the person next to you and the person next to them" and, by implication, through everyone. Agree or disagree? Why?

(g) "You are on holy ground and there is a holiness to the people around us." Discuss.

(h) (i) What do we learn about the holy spirit in this video?

(ii) Does it gell with what Jesus is talking about in John 15:26-16:16?

May you come to see that God is here right now with us all of the time.
 May you come to see that the ground you are standing on is holy.
 As you slow down, may you become aware that it is in 'Yod', 'Heh', 'Vav', 'Heh'
 that we live and we move and we breathe.

3. Read John 16:17-33.
 - (a) Why don't the disciples understand what Jesus is saying in verses 17 to 18?
 - (b) Jesus answers their questions not by giving them an explanation but by making them promises (vv 19-24). What are the promises?
 - (c) What does Jesus' resurrection do for us?
 - (d) What does it mean to "ask in Jesus' name" (vv 23-24, 26)?
 - (e) What do the disciples "believe at last" (v 31)?
 - (f) How has Jesus overcome the world (v 33)?

To finish

4. In John 16:17-18 the disciples don't understand what Jesus is talking about.
 - (a) How do we understand Jesus?
 - (b) How do we understand the Bible? Is it any different to understanding Jesus?
 - (b) What problems do we have in understanding Jesus or the Bible?
 - (c) What can we do that might help us overcome these problems?



Study 17, John ch 17, prayer

Getting started

1. Should church be for non-believers as well as believers? Why/why not?
(See 2007 Forum Booklet Response and 1 Cor 14:23-25.)
2. What would you pray for concerning this group if you were leaving it?

Bible

3. Read John 17:1-19.
 - (a) Jesus makes only one request for himself – that the Father would glorify him so he might glorify the Father. Why do you think that was so important to Jesus?
 - (b) What does it mean to glorify the Father?
 - (c) How can we bring glory to God?
4. What is surprising about the way Jesus describes eternal life (v 3)?
5. What will it mean for Jesus to finish the work his Father assigned him?
6. What do you think the Father has assigned you?
7. (a) What do you think being a Christian is?

Listen to Mike Paget preaching on John 17. Play ObedienceBeingChristianJohn17MPaget.mp3.

(b) What does “obedience” mean in a Christian’s life (John 17:6)?

Listen to Mike Paget preaching on John 17. Play ObedienceJohn17MPaget.mp3.

8. Twice Jesus asks the Father to protect his disciples from the evil one (vv 11, 15). Why would that protection be so important in Jesus’ mind as he faces the cross?

9. Often Christians are consumed with their need for protection – from harm, from sickness, from evil spirits. How does this compare to Jesus' agenda for prayer?



10. (a) What does “sanctify” mean (v 17)?

(b) Jesus asks the Father to sanctify his disciples through his Word (v 17). How can we allow God's Word to have that kind of effect on our lives?

11. I'm going to play a 2 minute excerpt from a sermon from All Souls Church in England. The speaker is Stephen Wookey (never heard of him!) and he's going to tell us what the truth is. He will refer to following passages which we will read before listening to the 2 minute excerpt.
John 14:6, Eph 4:21, John 8:32, 17:17, 18:37-38a

Play John17_6to19truthStephenWookeyAllSouls2mins.mp3 (2 mins on truth cut from the sermon).

So what does “the truth” mean when it is used in the Bible?

12. Read John 17:20-26.
What are the biggest threats to your spiritual safety and growth as a Christian?

13. (a) Who is Jesus praying for in verses 20-26?



(b) What does he want for them?

14. (a) Why is it so important that they get it right? What's at stake if they get it wrong (see also John 13:34-35)?

(b) How is it tied up with what Jesus says he will continue to do (v26)?

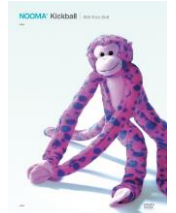
(c) What would it look like to get it right?

15. What does Jesus mean by unity?

16. Video

The Nooma video, #6, Kickball, by Rob Bell is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In this video Rob Bell talks about prayer but it is more about *not* getting what we pray for.

(a) What are your first impressions of this video?



(b) What are the similarities between, on one hand, Rob Bell *not* giving his son something and, on the other hand, God and us?

(c) If we don't get what we ask for in prayer what might we be tempted to think about God?

(d) What does Rob Bell suggest for the reason God doesn't give us what we ask for in prayer?

(e) If we don't get what we ask for in prayer what might we be tempted to think might be wrong with us?

Rob Bell finishes with "May you believe God is good and across the street he has something better".

To finish

17. "Jesus called us to be one – so all denominations should unite into one big church."
Do you agree or not? Why/why not?

18. Prayer

Construct your own prayer based on Jesus' model in John ch 17. Pray for yourself, the people closest to you and the people whom you influence in the workplace or neighbourhood. What do you want God to accomplish long-range in each person? Now pray the prayer regularly. Refine it as God gives you direction. Watch God work!

Study 18, John ch 18, arrested

Getting started

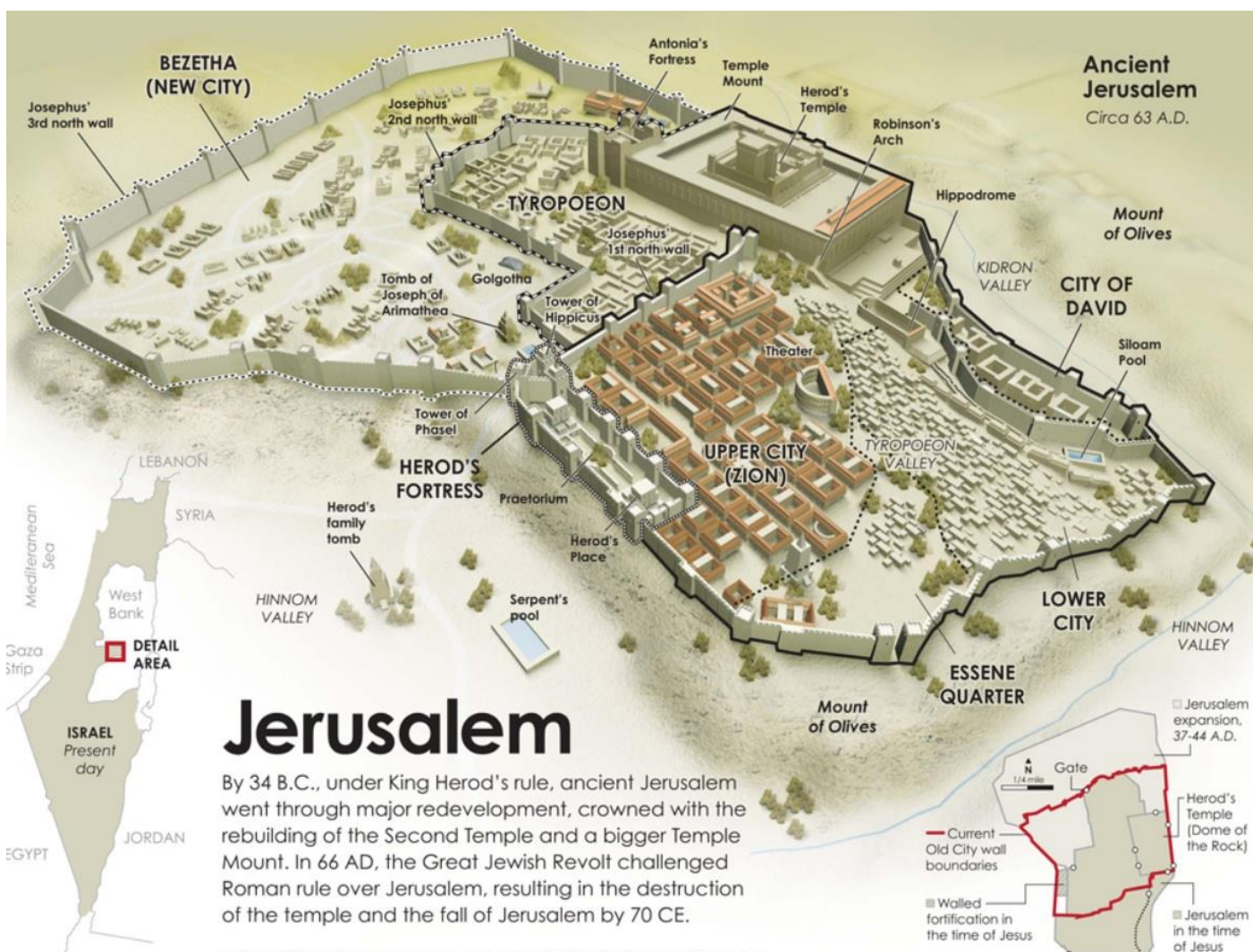
1. What is your favourite TV show?



According to the Sun Herald 24/5/2015 the most watched TV shows for the week ending 18/5/2015 were Seven News Sunday (1.45 million viewers in the mainland capitals), Catching Milat (1.39 million), Nine News Sunday (1.26 million), Master Chef (1.21 million) and House Rules Reveal (1.15 million). Perhaps this says something about how much we like bad news, violence, gossip and food.

Bible

2. Read John 18:1-14.



From <http://www.israelhebrew.com/map-of-ancient-jerusalem/>. Look at where the events of the last day in Jesus' life took place. Look for the location of the Temple, Kidron Valley, the Mount of Olives, and the suggestions for where Calvary/Golgotha/The Place of the Skull was,

- (a) Why did Peter want to fight?

(b) Why did Jesus not want to fight?



3. Read John 18:15-27?
(a) What were they asking Jesus?

(b) What were they asking Peter?

In 1990 archaeologists found twelve ossuaries — bone-boxes — in a cave in the northern Talpiot area of Jerusalem. Six of these were untouched, and one of them even contained a coin from the days of Herod Agrippa (AD 42-3). Two of the ossuaries bore the name of **Caiaphas**, one of which contained the bones of a sixty-year-old-man. We cannot be certain that this was the high priest mentioned in the Gospels, the man running Jerusalem and its environs during the time of Jesus. But it was a fancy tomb, and he was a very wealthy man.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, in the spring of AD 33, Caiaphas had been high priest for around fifteen years. Given the volatile nature of politics in his day, and given the fact that the Romans appointed the high priest, this was quite a remarkable feat of longevity. In all, he was to remain in post for nineteen years. When Pilate was recalled from Judea, it was only a matter of months before Caiaphas went as well. Clearly this is why he stayed in post so long. Pilate trusted him, or, at least, distrusted him less than any of the alternatives.

To attain the position of high priest — and to make a success of it — required a number of things. It required significant personal wealth, for one thing, since the high priest had to pay for certain key sacrifices, such as those on the Day of Atonement, out of his own pocket. But that was OK. Although we do not have any data about the income of the high priest, it must have been significant and it was probably drawn from the temple treasury. The fact that, as high priest, he appointed his own relatives to key posts such as temple treasurer would have given him access to a huge amount of capital.

This is borne out by archaeology. Excavations in Jerusalem have uncovered a weight measure from a home in the Upper City with the name 'Bar Kathros' on it. Kathros, as we saw earlier, was the name of one of the high-priestly families and the remains of other monumental houses nearby indicate that the neighbourhood was a wealthy one. And a religious one. One mansion — the so-called 'Palatial Mansion' — covers 600 square metres and contains a number of *miqvaot* for ritual bathing. This, then, was a house of wealth, but also of scrupulous attention to ritual purification: the kind of house, in fact, that might be owned by a high priest.

So you needed to be wealthy. And you certainly needed to use all the force associated with collaborationist regimes. You also needed a great deal of political nous. In particular, you needed the ability to compromise.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 213-214.

4. Read John 18:28-40.
(a) What is Jesus' kingdom (v 36)?

(b) What is truth (vv 37-38)? See question 11 of previous study.



Pilate as we have seen, was under pressure. The one thing he could not afford was any major trouble. So one imagines that he was not best pleased when, on the morning before Passover, he received a deputation from the temple with a prisoner. And his mood cannot have been lightened when, due to their concerns about Gentile impurity, the priests accompanying the prisoner refused to enter the palace itself for fear of being contaminated (John 18:28).

This explains why Pilate is, initially, reluctant to grant their request. The charge against Jesus was different depending on which body was trying him. For the high priest it was the threat against the temple. For the Sanhedrin it was the claim to be the Messiah. For Pilate, now, it is a straightforward bit of revolution: 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king' (Luke 23:2).

No blasphemy, nothing about the temple; just a direct challenge to Roman rule. The charge is one to which Pilate has to respond: the refusal to pay taxes and the claim to be the real ruler. By now, though, Jesus hardly looks like a king. Deprived of sleep, beaten, spat upon. Pilate's question, 'Are *you* the King of the Jews?' is clearly sarcastic (Mark 15:2). But his sarcasm is met with Jesus' deadpan response: 'You say so.'

Pilate's immediate response is to reject the request (Luke 23:4). There is a strong sense of irritation in Pilate's words in this first encounter. But the temple authorities persist with their accusations and Pilate hears a word which offers him an easy way out: 'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place' (Luke 23:5).

Galilee. Those Galileans again. The ones who caused problems at the last festival. Possibly the delegation mention Galilee because they know Pilate had some Galileans killed last time. But they miscalculate. Pilate has a score to settle with those annoying Herodian princes, who forced him to climb down.

Jesus is from Galilee, so let the ruler of Galilee deal with it. Send the man to Antipas. . . .

The idea that Pilate is an innocent party in all this is not one which is entertained by any of the Gospels. It is actually an idea which is promulgated by those who would rather that no Western European could be blamed for Jesus' death. But all the Gospels agree that Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified. Pilate was afraid at points, and he was, to a certain extent, manipulated. But he was also manipulating others. His overriding concern throughout this is not that an innocent man would be killed, but that he, Pilate, would be blamed.

In John's account, Pilate's dialogue with Jesus consists almost entirely of questions: 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (John 18:33); 'What have you done?' (John 18:35); 'So you are a king?' (John 18:37); 'What is truth?' (John 18:38). The cynical *realpolitik* of this statement shows us the truth about Pilate's world. This is not about the truth; it is about what is effective, what is best for Pilate, for Rome. Pilate does not care about Jesus, whatever his wife may have dreamed (Matt. 27:19). If he wanted to release Jesus, he could have done. He could have held him in custody until after the festival. He could have ridden out the storm. But what would that have gained him?

The fact is that Pilate wants to use this opportunity to strengthen his position, but he has to find out whether Jesus has any popular support. The way to do that is to give the people in the courtyard a choice. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection ...' (Mark 15:6-15).

There is no known precedent for this: provincial governors do not seem to have had the right to grant a pardon. However, amnesties are not unknown in the Greco-Roman world. Matthew and Mark suggest that it was a regular custom at Passover, but John implies that it was a Jewish custom. In that case, it may be a custom dating back to Herod's rule — or even before. The strongest argument for the historicity of the event is that it is in all the Gospels and the historical details in the Gospels must, at least, have been credible to their readers and listeners. If prefects never released a prisoner on amnesty, then one would have thought that the story would not appear so prominently in all the Gospels. The fact that it is there means that it was not impossible. . . .

The different Gospels have different 'decision' points. Matthew implies that Pilate feared a riot was about to start (Matt. 27:24). John shows Pilate still uncertain, and still affected by something about Jesus. Which is when the temple leaders play their trump card: 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor' (John 19:12).

It is the perfect leverage. This is a specific threat. Caesar's Friends — *amici Caesaris* — were an informal grouping whose membership was reserved for high-ranking Romans awarded this status. Loss of the rank *amicus Caesaris* led to political and social ostracism, even suicide.

So Pilate makes a decision. As far as he can see, Jesus is without popular and political support, and the Jewish leaders are threatening to take their complaint to the emperor. Time for action. Or inaction, if you prefer. 'So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves"' (Matt. 27:24).

Nothing to do with me, guy. My hands are clean. Having given into the crowd, Pilate absolves himself of personal responsibility. He has Jesus brought out and gives them one last chance: 'Shall I crucify your King?' The question is deliberately mocking. That is the point, he is *not* their king. Pilate is winding them up. And it works, for the chief priests answer, 'We have no king but the emperor' (John 19:15).

Brilliant. Back of the net. Despite the precariousness of his position, despite his appearance of being manipulated, Pilate has secured from the chief priests a proclamation of loyalty to Rome and the emperor.

That's Pilate for you. What a cunning, highly attuned political manipulator the man is. Just when you think he is down and out, just when you think the grizzled old soldier is beaten, he pulls this out of the bag. He has mended his relationship with Antipas, secured a declaration of loyalty from the Jewish leadership, maintained order, quelled a potential riot and freed himself of responsibility, even though it will be his troops who carry out the sentence. And all it cost was the death of one Galilean peasant.

Not bad for a Friday morning. And it's not even nine o'clock.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 251-256.

To finish

5. (a) Besides God, what 3 things are you the most sure about?

(b) Why are you so sure about these things?

Study 19, John ch 19, death

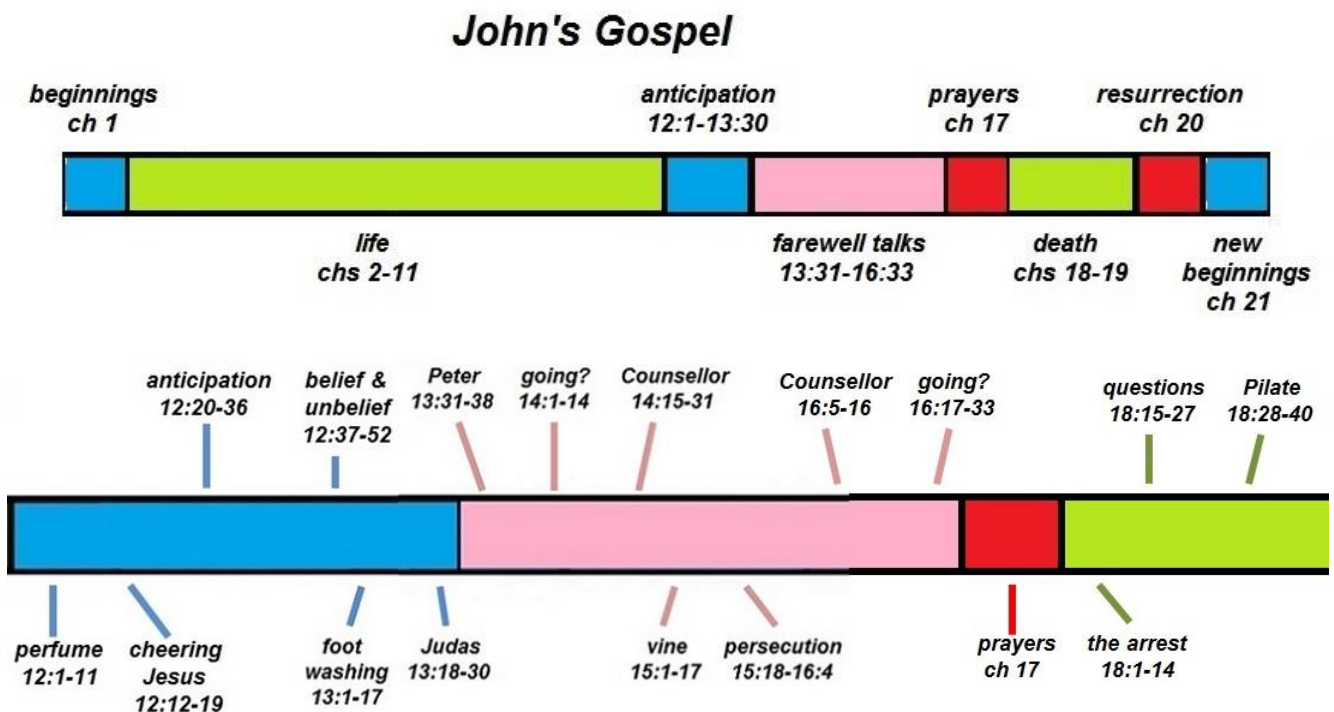
Getting started

1. Have you ever been in a pressure situation?

What was it?

How did you handle it?

The story so far . . .



Bible

2. Read John 19:1-16.
What pressure is Pilate under?
3. Read John 19:17-27.
(a) Why didn't Pilate change the sign?

(b) Jesus had brothers (see Mark 3:31-35, John 7:2-5). Why didn't they look after their mother (v 27)?

4. Read John 19:28-37.
What was finished (v 30)?



He dies quickly, that was something. **Crucifixion** victims could linger for days - indeed, they were not intended to go quickly. Crucifixion was expected to keep them in sight, on display, as it were. The speed of Jesus' death - which came as a surprise to Pilate — indicates that he was actually badly injured before he even came to the cross. We have seen that he was unable to carry his own crossbeam to the site of execution, despite the distance from Herod's Palace to Golgotha being reasonably short.

He had simply lost too much blood. When the blood loss reaches a certain level, victims enter what is termed hypovolemic shock, where the blood loss is so great that there is simply not enough to deliver oxygen to the organs. The external bleeding from the whips and the nails, and the internal bleeding from the beating, would have been more than enough. Many people sentenced to crucifixion actually died during the beating. Jesus died on the cross; that is certainly true. But that was not what killed him. He had, essentially, been beaten to death by soldiers that morning.

The bandits on either side of Jesus were dispatched by having their legs broken. This practice — what the Romans called *crurifragium* — did not mean that they could no longer support themselves. They were supported by the small peg on which they sat. What it did was induce more trauma into an already savagely traumatised body. Jesus, however, was already dead.

With Jesus' death, we go further into the twilight world of strangeness that began with the darkness. To be certain of Jesus' death, a soldier stabbed him through the side with a spear and, John tells us, blood and water came out (John 19:31-37). He links it with two Old Testament prophecies; probably it was 'haemorrhagic fluid' in the space between the ribs and the lungs. But it was not normal.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 261-262.

A few discrepancies to the above come from John The Way to True Life by Douglas Connelly p 116, as follows:

The legs of the victim were broken in order to speed his death. Survival on the cross required the victim to push up with his legs so that his lungs could fill with air. Hanging from his hands produced paralysis in the diaphragm. Only the constant and painful up-and-down movement allowed the man to live. When his legs were broken, he could no longer push up and, as a result, died in a few minutes. A victim of crucifixion did not die from loss of blood but from suffocation.

The blood and water that flowed from the spear wound in Jesus' side (v. 34) was another evidence of his death. The blood in the heart had already separated. The heavier red blood cells had separated from the plasma, the clear liquid John called "water." John records this observation as another proof that Jesus actually died. Modern theories that Jesus swooned or fainted on the cross and later revived have no support in the facts recorded for us by eyewitnesses.

5. Read John 19:38-42.
What do the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus show?

There was not much time before sunset and the start of the Sabbath. **Joseph of Arimathea** made his way to Herod's Palace and persuaded Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus and give it a decent burial.

He is depicted as a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, although not, perhaps, an influential one. Arimathea, his town of origin, is unknown. It was not in Galilee, since Luke calls Arimathea 'a Jewish town' (Luke 23:51), meaning that it was in Judea. Wherever he had started, he was now permanently domiciled in Jerusalem, which is why he had bought a tomb there. Joseph of Arimathea may also have been a Pharisee. Mark and Luke tell us that he was 'waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God', which would mean that, theologically, he was not a Sadducee (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50). John says he had kept his interest in Jesus

quiet for fear of the Jewish leadership (John 19:38). At this point, however, they were all on the other side of the city, in or around the temple, active in the Passover preparations.

Having been assured that Jesus was dead, Joseph was granted permission to take the body and bury it. There was no time for the usual rituals. No time for the complex wrapping of the body, the binding up of the chin as was done in Lazarus's case. Jesus was not even washed — the minimum one would expect, since blood on a corpse was considered unclean. Even in death he did not wash properly.

Jesus was placed in a new tomb, which Joseph had purchased for his family. A disused quarry made an ideal place for a Jewish burial ground, since it would have had plenty of rockface, where a cave could be excavated. Jewish tombs of the period were mainly what are called loculi tombs, consisting of a doorway into a central chamber, with loculi, or niches, cut into the walls to hold the bodies. The loculi were about sixty centimetres wide and tunnelled into the rock to a depth of around two metres. The arrangement is not unlike those drawers in a morgue. Inside the main body of the chamber there would often be a stone ledge or bench on which bodies could be laid. Other types of tomb had shelves or ledges for the bodies rather than loculi niches.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 263-264.

To finish

6. Woody Allen made this comment about death (you've probably heard it before):
 "It's not that I'm afraid to die, it's just that I don't want to be there when it happens."

Another quote from Woody Allen that you may not have heard before comes from an article in *Esquire Magazine* called "Woody Allen wipes the smile off his face" and it goes:

"Death is absolutely stupefying in its terror and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless. It makes our lives look as irrelevant as waves breaking on the seashore. Our achievements seem to disappear with the aroma of the funeral flowers."



- (a) What did Jesus achieve by his (i) death?

- (ii) life?

- (b) Do our achievements become meaningless when we die? Why/why not?

Study 20, John ch 20

Getting started

1. (a) Besides your conversion, what was a life changing moment in your life?

(b) How did you feel?



Bible

2. Read John 20:1-18.
(a) Trace how these people would have felt during the course of this event
- Mary.



- Simon Peter.

- "the other disciple, the one who Jesus loved".

(b) What do you make of verse 10?

In v 17 Jesus tells Mary not to hold onto him. Various suggestions are given by commentators. Probably the simplest is right. That is that now was not a time for Mary to cling to Jesus but to go and share the good news with the other disciples.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 34 by Mark Wormell.

3. Read John 20:19-23.
(a) Who did Jesus talk to?

(b) What did they feel?

(c) What is Jesus sending them to do?

(d) How are they equipped?

A question arises how Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit into them fits with the account in Acts 2. Various suggestions are given by commentators. They are too numerous to mention here. As Don Carson says, we should not make John's account captive to the account in Acts 2. I think it is most likely that this was a private conferral of the Holy Spirit, followed by the public outpouring at Pentecost.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 34 by Mark Wormell.

4. Read John 20:24-31.

(a) Trace the course of Thomas' feelings.

(b) How can we help people who have doubts?

(c) The writer of this gospel makes a comment on the book he has written (vv 30-31).

What is he saying about (i) his selection of events?

(ii) his purpose in writing this gospel?

(c) What does it mean practically to have life in Jesus' name (v 31)?

To finish

5. What is the connection between how you feel and the decisions you make?



Use the event you described in question one as an example.

Study 21, John ch 21, on the beach

Getting started

1. What has someone said to you that made a big difference to your life?

It was customary in our congregation to encourage young men to enter into the privilege of worship by standing and praying aloud. That particular Sunday I sensed the pressure of the saints (not, I fear, the leading of the Spirit), and I responded by unsteadily leaving my chair, for the first time, with the intention of praying.

Filled less with worship than with nervousness, I found my theology becoming confused to the point of heresy. I remember thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave. Stuttering throughout, I finally thought of the word *Amen* (perhaps the first evidence of the Spirit's leading), said it, and sat down. I recall staring at the floor, too embarrassed to look around, and solemnly vowing *never again* to pray or speak aloud in front of a group.

When the service was over, I darted toward the door, not wishing to encounter an elder who might feel obliged to correct my twisted theology. But I was not quick enough. An older Christian man named Jim Dunbar intercepted me, put his arm on my shoulder, and cleared his throat to speak.

I remember thinking to myself, "Here it comes. Oh well, just endure it and then get to the car." I then listened to this godly gentleman speak words that I can repeat verbatim today, more than twenty years later.

"Larry," he said, "there's one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I'm behind you one thousand per cent." Then he walked away.

Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being. My resolve never again to speak publicly weakened instantly.

From Encouragement The Key to Caring p24 by Larry Crabb and Dan Allender.

Bible

2. Read John 21:1-14.
Why is it surprising to find the disciples fishing (John 20:19-23)?
3. What happened when they were obedient to Jesus?
4. Why do you think John tells us the exact number of fish caught?
5. What do you think is the main reason John includes this incident in his gospel?
6. What is Jesus demonstrating to them in this encounter?



7. How do you think Peter might have felt about meeting Jesus again after recently denying him three times (see John 18:15-27)?
8. Read John 21:15-19.
In verse 15 why does Jesus ask Peter if he loves him more than the other disciples (see Matt 26:31-35)?
9. Why does Jesus ask Peter three times if Peter loves him (John 18:15-27)?
10. How do you think Peter feels now?
11. (a) Who are Jesus' sheep and how is Peter going to feed them?

(b) What's it going to cost Peter to do that (vv 18-19)?
12. Read John 21:20-25.
Why do you think Peter asked about John in verses 20-21?

To finish

13. Do you find it encouraging that when Jesus comes back he has a fish barbecue with his mates, rather than seeking justice against the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities that gave him a false trial and tortured and killed him?
14. Make notes on what you can say to particular people you know, who need help and encouragement.



One possibility is that the author was getting near death, and knew that there was not reason, in anything Jesus had said, why he should not die as all the other original apostles had died. But a rumour had gone around in the early church, based on a misunderstanding of what Jesus had said to Peter, that John would be the one original apostle who would remain alive until the lord returned.

We may suppose, then, that the elderly apostle, or someone else at his dictation and suggestion, wrote ch 21 and added it to the book that had already been finished. Indeed, verse 24 looks, liked a note from somebody else, either a scribe or a close friend, to certify that the beloved disciple really was the author, and could be trusted. The new version of the book could then be circulated, after the death of the beloved disciple, to make it clear that this had not upset Jesus' intentions.

From John for Everyone part 2 chapters 11-21 p 168 by Tom Wright.

It appears here that there are two endings, one ending at 20:30, and then chapter 21. Chapter 21 has been called an epilogue. Some have suggested that chapter 21 is written by someone else. There are good reasons to doubt this. For example, the loose end of Jesus' relationship with Peter is resolved in chapter 21. Jesus' leadership after the resurrection is confirmed. The role of the church is set out. There is no textual evidence that chapter 21 was added later, and did not form part of the original.

From Light the Dark the gospel of John study 36 by Mark Wormell.

John's Gospel

