
Transformissional Discipleship

Learning to Follow Jesus Through the Gospel of John

Ambassador Church • February 8, 2010



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Learning to Follow Jesus through the Gospel of John

A GUIDE TO GROWING DEEPER AND WIDER IN OUR WALK WITH CHRIST THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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A Word From the Pastor

Learning to Follow Jesus through the Gospel of John

In the movie, *“The Book of Eli”* (2010), the main character wanders through a barren wasteland that has been devastated by some catastrophic event thirty years prior. He is one of the few people alive, and in his possession is the last remaining Bible on earth. His mission is simply to carry this book across the wasteland to the west. Along the way, he defends the book against those who want to steal it and use it for their own selfish purposes. Without giving away what happens, toward the end of the movie, he makes a heart-felt confession. He confesses that while he spent so much time protecting the book, he regrets not having lived by the book.

As I watched this movie, I was reminded that as followers of Jesus, it should not be our goal to simply carry around our Bibles, or to be collectors of every version of the Bible. While we may love the book and protect it, the goal of our lives is to live according to the book so we can be transformed by it and change the world around us. This is what it means to be a disciple.

A “disciple” is simply a follower of Jesus and “discipleship” is the process of helping others become followers of him. As followers of Jesus, the manual for teaching us how to live our lives is the Bible. While no one would argue that knowledge of the Bible is important, the most important thing is to be living our lives by it, not just reading or even studying it. Just as the Bible is essential for discipleship, the process by which God uses to help us grow is through others, especially others who are further along in their spiritual journey than we are.

Therefore, the combination of someone else helping us walk through God's word *is* the process of discipleship.

Our purpose with this workbook is to have you discipled and to disciple others through the God's Word. Because the Bible is so immense in content, we have selected the Gospel of John as a place for us to begin this journey.

Our prayer is that this material will help you grow deeper as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Please let us know how your journey of following Jesus is going, and how we can help encourage you! May God bless you as you gaze upon the glory of the Son who came to earth to dwell among us (John 1:14). May you become more and more like our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Pastor Ray Chang

PastorRay@ambassadorchurch.com

Getting the Most out of this Book

Learning to Follow Jesus through the Gospel of John

To get the most out of this workbook, you need to make some key commitments:

1) Commitment to a Discipleship Relationship

You need to make a commitment to others in your group that you will complete this workbook together. While the workbook is an important part of the process – the workbook is not the process. The discipleship process is based on relationships. The key is for commitment to a relationship and building the relationship together.

2) Commitment to a Discipleship Covenant

You will need to establish a covenant with all the members involved. This is a covenant to establish the time, place, and duration of this discipleship journey. A sample covenant is on page 7.

3) Commitment to God's Word and His Spirit to Transform

Ultimately, the only true transformation will come from God's Spirit. We need to walk in the Spirit through His Word as He becomes the primary agent of spiritual transformation in our lives. As you begin to read through the Gospel of John, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what you are studying.

4) Commitment to Multiply

Our goal is not simply for people who have a relationship with God to go deeper in that relationship. The purpose of this discipleship process is for each disciple of Christ to pass on the work of discipleship to others. From the onset, your goal is to find someone else that you can begin discipling.

Study Format

What you can expect in this workbook

Big Idea- This will be the main focus of the lesson for the chapter.

Key Memory Verse- Each chapter will have a memory verse as part of our discipleship process. As we memorize Scripture, our lives will begin to be shaped by Scripture.

Digging Deeper- This is where we will examine the text to discover what the Bible has to say about the passage. The goal of Bible study is not just information, but ultimately application.

Living Wider- Each section will have a follow up with reading, further discussions or application.

Discipleship Covenant

Learning to Follow Jesus through the Gospel of John

In order to grow toward maturity in Christ by completing the workbook, I commit to the following standards:

1. Complete all assignments on a weekly basis prior to my discipleship appointment in order to contribute fully.
2. Meet weekly with my discipleship partners for approximately one and one-half hours to dialogue over the content of the assignments:
3. Offer myself fully to the Lord with the anticipation that I am entering a time of accelerated transformation during this discipleship period.
4. Contribute to a climate of honesty, trust and personal vulnerability in a spirit of mutual encouragement.
5. Give serious consideration to continuing the discipling chain by committing myself to invest in at least two other people for the year following the initial completion of this workbook.
6. Pray regularly for the Holy Spirit to open my eyes and change my heart to make me more like Jesus.

Signed _____ Dated _____

(The above commitments are the minimum standards of accountability, which are reviewed and renewed before lessons eight and fifteen. Feel free to add any other elements to your covenant.)

Following Jesus - Call to Discipleship

John 1:35-50

SUMMARY POINTS

Memory Verse: John 1:40-41

Digging Deeper: John 1:35-51

Living Wider: Reading, "*A Biblical Call to Making Disciples*" by Greg Ogden

BIG IDEA

Jesus calls ordinary people to follow him as disciples. He promises to show them "greater things" and ultimately change the world through this relationship.

Definition of Discipleship

"Discipleship is an intentional process over a period of time based on a relationship and God's Word to equip a person to be a follower of Jesus for deep spiritual maturity and wide missional impact. "

1. What are the elements of discipleship mentioned in this definition?
2. Restate this definition in your own words.
3. How does this apply in your life? What questions does this raise in your life?

MEMORY VERSE

In John 1:40-41, we see for the first time Jesus calling men to follow him. Notice who they were and why they were following Jesus.

**“Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).”
John 1:40-41**

1. Context: In John 1, we see Jesus calling the disciples to himself. What strikes you about the way Jesus calls people?

2. Summarize this passage in your own words:

3. How can you apply this passage to being a disciple and/or making disciples?

DIGGING DEEPER

To understand John’s Gospel, you have to look at the bookends in John 1 and John 20. Chapter 1:1 records the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Chapter 20:31 states the purpose of this book, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

In the prologue and postlude, we see that Jesus came as God's Son to bring salvation to those who believe. While this is the purpose of the book, it is important to notice that the method Jesus chooses to use to carry out his work is through the development of followers, called “disciples”.

Discipleship is the process of becoming more like Jesus. Part of our purpose in becoming more like Jesus is to live in a way that pleases God, so that we can better to share Jesus with those around us. Let's explore who Jesus calls and why.

1. Read John 1:35-51. What do you notice about the people Jesus called?
2. How did Jesus call them? Why did he call them?
3. Compare this with other passages in the gospels where Jesus calls his first disciples (Luke 5:1-11) . How does this passage help us understand more about how Jesus calls his followers?
4. As Jesus gathers growing number of followers, he eventually selects twelve, which he called "the twelve" (John 6:67) or "apostles" (the sent ones) (Mark 3:13-19). What does Jesus do before he identifies the twelve? (See Luke 6:12-16)
5. While the other three gospels give a very similar account of the calling of the disciples, John gives a very personal account of Jesus' calling. What do you notice about the personal nature of Jesus' call?

6. From this passage, what are some ingredients to a discipleship relationship?
See John 1:39,41,50.

7. How did Jesus call you to be his follower?

8. What questions does this passage raise for you about discipleship?

9. When selecting someone to disciple, how does this passage and other passages in the gospels guide your selection process?

10. What can you apply in this passage to your life right now (e.g., sin to confess, action to do, areas to grow, etc.)?

LIVING WIDER

"MAKING OF A DISCIPLE" BY GREG ODGEN

When Jesus commanded his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28: 19), he spoke the mission statement for the church. Jesus told his disciples to do what he had done during his three years of ministry. Jesus made disciples by selecting a few into whom he poured his life.

Jesus' Method of Disciple-Making

What was the strategic advantage of having 12 men who would "be with him" (Mark 3: 14)? There are many reasons, but two seem most relevant:

- **Internalization.** By focusing on a few, Jesus was able to ensure the lasting nature of his mission. We might wonder why Jesus would risk others' jealousy by publicly selecting 12 from a larger group of disciples (Luke 6:13). Why didn't Jesus simply continue to expand his growing entourage and create a mass movement? The apostle John captures Jesus' caution when people clamored to him because of the marvelous signs: "But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone~ for he himself knew what was in everyone" (John 2:24-25 NRSV). Though Jesus ministered to the needs of the crowds, he knew they were fickle. The same ones who shouted "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday were shouting "Crucify him" five days later on Good Friday. Knowing the whims of the throng, Jesus built his ministry on a select few who would form the superstructure of his future kingdom. Disciples cannot be mass produced, but are the product of intimate and personal investment. A. B. Bruce summarizes this point: "The careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher's influence on the world should be permanent, his Kingdom should be founded on deep indestructible convictions in the minds of few, not on the shifting sands of superficial impressions on the minds of many."

- **Multiplication.** Just because Jesus focused much of his attention on a few does not mean that he did not want to reach the multitudes. Just the opposite. Eugene Peterson puts truth cleverly: "Jesus, it must be remembered, restricted nine-tenths of his ministry to 12 Jews, because it was the only way reach all Americans." Jesus had enough vision to think small. Focusing did not limit his influence-it expanded it. When Jesus ascended to the Father, he knew that there were at least 11 others who could minister under the authority of his name-an eleven fold multiplication of his ministry. Robert Coleman captures the heart of Jesus' methodology when he writes, "[Jesus'] concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes but with men the multitudes would follow."

Paul's Approach to Disciple-Making

We see that the apostle Paul adopted the same goal and methodology in his ministry that Jesus modeled. Paul's version of the Great Commission is his personal mission statement: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works within me" (Colossians 1:28-29). Paul is so passionate about making disciples that he compares his agony over the maturity of the flock to the labor pains of a woman giving birth: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).

Following Jesus' method, Paul invested in individuals to make disciples. He too had his sights on the multitudes, but he knew that solid transmission of the faith would not occur as readily through speaking to an audience. Paul encouraged Timothy to use a personal style to link the gospel to future generations when he exhorted him, "What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well" (2 Timothy 2:2 NRSV, emphasis added). Paul envisioned an intergenerational chain of disciples linked together

through personal investment. Contained in this verse are generations in the discipling network, creating the following path: Paul » Timothy » faithful people » teach others.

We know Paul lived out this admonition, for his letters are filled with the names of those to whom he gave himself. Paul replaced himself in the battle with soldiers like Timothy, Titus, Silas (Silvanus), Euodia, Syntyche, Epaphroditus, and Priscilla and Aquila. They accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys, were entrusted with ministry responsibility, and became co-laborers in the gospel. Paul attributed the change in their lives to the impact of the message of Christ in his life on them.

The Bible teaches us not only the message of our faith, but also the method by which that faith is to be passed on to future generations. We are called to do God's work in God's way. The manner in which the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs up against life. We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling. Paul said, "I urge you to imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4: (6) and "You became imitators of us and of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Disciple-Making Today

Disciple-making ensures that the gospel is embedded deeply in the lives of mature believers who serve as links to the future. Discipling, then, is a relationship where we intentionally walk alongside a growing disciple or disciples in order to encourage, correct, and challenge them in love to grow toward maturity in Christ.

There are three ingredients necessary to produce maturity in Christ. First, "relational vulnerability" means honest, self-disclosing and confessional relationships that give the Holy Spirit permission to remake us. Second, "the centrality of truth" is emphasized when people open their lives to one another around the truth of God's Word, and the Lord begins to rebuild their lives from the inside out. And third, "mutual accountability" is authority given to others to hold us accountable to mutually agreeable standards-"iron sharpening iron."

We will not make disciples through methods of mass production that attempt shortcuts to maturity. Robert Coleman clarifies the challenge: "One must decide where he wants his ministry to count-in the momentary applause of popular recognition or the reproduction of his life in a few chosen men who will carry on his work after he has gone."

The irony is that focusing on a few takes a long-range view by multiplying the number of disciples, and therefore expands a church's leadership base. Though adult education programs and small-group ministries are good tools to produce maturity, without the focus of small discipling units, a solid foundation is difficult to build.

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DISCUSS

1. What were the strengths of Jesus' and Paul's disciple-making methods? What were the risks?

2. Is it realistic to expect New Testament methods of discipleship to be effective in today's culture? Why or why not?

3. What steps will our church need to take in order to adopt a long-range discipleship program similar to Jesus' and Paul's?

FOLLOW UP

1. Listen to the sermon online on Transformational Discipleship at www.sermon.net/pastorray

2. Read The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert Coleman

3. Read Transformation Discipleship by Greg Ogden

4. Purchase The NIV Application Commentary by Gary Burge for further study in John.

Cleansing the Temple

John 2:12-24

SUMMARY POINTS

Memory Verse: John 2:17

Digging Deeper: John 2:12-24

Living Wider: Reading, an excerpt from The NIV Application Commentary.

BIG IDEA

Jesus leads by example in cleansing the temple, using this outward act of purification as a symbolic demonstration of the replacement of the Temple itself, which will be fulfilled in him.

MEMORY VERSE

“His disciples remembered that it is written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’.” John 2:17

1. Context: Here in this passage, Jesus gives one example for his disciples of what discipleship actually looks like in the real world; and it stirs up a memory in his disciples from Scripture. What catches your attention about this scenario?

2. Summarize this passage in your own words.

3. How can you apply this passage to being a disciple and/or making disciples?

DIGGING DEEPER

As we continue our journey into discipleship, we can learn from the biblical stories surrounding those who lived their daily lives with Jesus. Let's explore our passage, and work through some of the 'basic' questions.

1. Read John 2:12-17. Where is Jesus? Who is with him?
2. Where does the passage tell us they are going? Why are they going there?
3. What does Jesus find when he gets to the temple in Jerusalem?
4. How does Jesus respond? Why do you think he responds that way?
5. Read John 2:18-24. The Jews brought a demand to Jesus, yet he uses this opportunity to give them something more than merely an answer to their demand. What is it that they demanded?
6. What does the demand reveal about what the Jews were focusing on?

7. As the encounter continues, what temple was Jesus talking about?

8. When did the disciples remember what Jesus had said?

9. What questions does this passage raise for you about following Jesus?

10. What in this passage can you apply to your life right now (e.g., sin to confess; action to do; areas to grow; etc.)?

LIVING WIDER

The following is an excerpt out of the Bridging Contexts section of “John 2:12-25” from *The NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: John*. By Gary M. Burge. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 2000.

The temple story. We dare not miss the importance of what Jesus has done in Jerusalem. When we begin to realize the significance and the grandeur of the Jerusalem temple in Jesus’ day, we will begin to feel the magnitude of what he tried to do. The temple was the organizing center of Jewish life in the first century. It was the center of government (brokered at this time by Roman authority), judicial law, religious life, and taxation. It set the moral, religious, and political tone of the country. When Judas Maccabeus decided to defeat the Greeks in the second century B.C., he knew he needed to capture the temple first in order to win popular Jewish support. When the Romans occupied the land in 63 B.C.

under the conquest of Pompey, they recognized immediately the need for a fortress in Jerusalem next to the temple, and at once began fortifying the Antonia Fortress on the temple's northwest corner. This is the site where Pilate's soldiers "prepared" Jesus for crucifixion.

When the Zealots stood against Rome in A.D. 66, once again the temple became their fortress and standard, the rallying point for Judaism's fight for survival. The temple was the basis of Jewish religious and national pride. When we add to this Herod's rebuilding program that lasted over eighty years, it is no wonder that when the Galilean disciples of Jesus arrive in Jerusalem, they exclaim about the wonder of the place. "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" (Mark 13:1). The Jerusalem temple dazzled visitors. When the Roman Titus's troops stormed the temple in A.D. 70, he was so amazed at the splendor of the place that he tried to preserve it from looting and destruction. But his soldiers, having fought a vicious, lengthy battle for the city, discovered its riches, and the temple was doomed. Burned to the ground in A.D. 70, it has never been rebuilt.¹⁸

Therefore Jesus' activity was not merely upsetting, it was outrageous. He was in the center of the public square, and he made a public protest.

We have to be careful not to make too much of the violence of this scene, however. I have seen pictures of Jesus brandishing a terrible black whip, eyes glaring, tables flying, people running, animals yelping. The Jewish law stipulated that weapons could not be brought into the temple, and a whip was classified as a weapon. Temple police (particularly at festival time) were charged with keeping public order. Hence Jesus probably did not bring a formal whip into the temple, but instead improvised something with straw or rushes used for animal bedding. If he had brought in anything else, I expect he would have been arrested.

Nevertheless the scene is dramatic, provocative, and upsetting. Furniture was broken; animals went running; coins flew from their scales. Jesus makes a disturbance and acts out the core of his prophetic message. But it is not the power of the whip that makes his message succeed. It is his moral power; the truth of what he says strikes to the heart of these people's consciences. It is interesting that in the concluding conversation, no one argues with Jesus about what he has done. No one objects, saying that such activity is inappropriate. Instead, they ask about the basis of his doing it. In other words, many likely know that Jesus is right and that the temple has turned into a noisy market. Its services have been compromised. They sense too something of God's divine and righteous anger at work in Jesus, something of God's impatience with a people who have misused the sanctity of his house.

The passage bears down on my century with the following question: What do I do with Jesus' civil disobedience? Does this become a license for our disobedience at the center of our places of living?

A second subject centers on the Christological message of the narrative. On a historical level, Jesus is confronting the chief religious institution of his day. Implicit in his ironic, closing statement is that something will be destroyed (the temple? his body?) and something again will be raised in three days. Jesus is pointing out the deficits of the institution of the temple; he is confronting its misdirection and its brokenness, and in the process (as happens throughout the Gospel) he indicates that the real activity of God, the real temple, is Jesus Christ himself. In other words, the focal point of Jewish religious affections must be replaced by someone new. And that replacement will undergo a violent and miraculous death and rebirth.

The troubling connection with my world is the extent to which our religious

institutions are doing the same thing as the Jerusalem temple. Put more directly, if Jesus were to arrive at a church in my city, would he build a whip out of pew rope or would he praise God for what is happening there? This passage invites speculation about religious institutions generally (like the story in Cana invites reflection about personal religious preoccupations). Left on the historical level, it simply becomes one more story about Jesus and his struggles and conflicts with Judaism. But when I examine the timeless meaning of this story, I see here the struggle between God's desire to be worshiped and the religious institutions humans frequently build and edify in order to facilitate that worship. The two are not always the same. Religious institutions sometimes pursue financial interests or social agendas when all they are designed to do is facilitate our relationship with God and set us loose in the world to change it.

For Further Discussion and/or Contemplation

1. How has Jesus cleansed our lives?
2. What are some of the things that we demand from Jesus?
3. What sign has Jesus given us to believe in?
4. What will you ask Jesus to clear out of your life this week?
5. Is there a demanding attitude that you need to change today?

FOLLOW UP

1. Listen to the sermon online on Transformissional Discipleship at <http://www.sermon.net/pastorray>
2. Read *Jesus Mean And Wild* by Mark Galli.

Nature of Spiritual Transformation

John 3:1-21

SUMMARY POINTS

Memory Verse: John 3:5

Digging Deeper: John 3:9-21, Numbers 21:4-9

Living Wider: *Eight Surprises about Heaven* by Jason Boyett

BIG IDEA

Spiritual Transformation happens when we allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse us from sin and breathe new life into us.

MEMORY VERSE

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’” John 3:5

CONTEXT

Belief in Jesus as the messiah is very important in the coming chapters. In the last chapter, the disciples believed when he turned water into wine (2:11) and the crowds believed when they saw the signs he was doing (2:23). Now, during Passover in Jerusalem, a Pharisee comes to him at night to talk about what it means to believe in Jesus as the messiah. Chapters 3-4 are important as they show three distinct people believing in Jesus and becoming his followers: Nicodemus (Jewish), the woman at the well (Samaritan), and a Roman official (Gentile).

1. Why did Nicodemus and other Pharisees believe Jesus was a teacher from God (v. 2)?

2. Jesus tells Nicodemus that there is only one way to truly see the Kingdom of God. What must happen for people to see the Kingdom of God (v. 3)?

3. In your own words, what does it mean to be “born again”?

4. Read verses 5-8. How does Jesus explain being “born again”?

5. Read Ezekiel 36:25-27. The Israelites were rebelling against God and he tells them he is about to use them to vindicate his holy name. How do these verses shed light on John 3:5-8?

6. Describe the importance of the Holy Spirit in bringing spiritual transformation (new birth) into our lives?

7. Summarize this verse in your own words.

8. How can you apply this passage to being a disciple and/or making disciples?

DIGGING DEEPER

We just saw the important role of the Holy Spirit in beginning Spiritual Transformation in our lives. Now in the remaining verses, we will see the role of the rest of the trinity in Spiritual Transformation. In verses 9-15 the focus will be on God the Son and on verses 16-21 the focus will be on God the Father.

1. In verse 9, Nicodemus has a hard time believing what Jesus is saying about being born again through the Holy Spirit. He thinks he is part of the Kingdom of God because he is Jewish. However, in verses 14-15, Jesus tells him how to be born again. What does Jesus say?

2. Jesus makes a reference to Numbers 21 when snakes were killing the Israelites in the desert. Read Numbers 21:4-9. What light does this shed on Jesus and eternal life?

The journey of spiritual transformation goes through the cross. Just as we can't be born again without the work of the Spirit, we can't have eternal life without "the Son of Man" being lifted up on the cross to die for our sins.

3. Verses 16-21 begin and end with "God". Read vs. 16-17. What did God do? Why?

Verses 18-21 contrast the followers of Jesus with those who do not follow him. Those who follow him live in the light and are not condemned. Those who do not follow him live in the darkness and are condemned. The way into the light is by believing in Jesus as Savior.

4. Are you living in the light? Why or why not?

5. Do you feel completely forgiven and pure by God?

6. Are there areas in your life that you need to surrender to God so you can “come into the light”?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you loved the world so much that you sent your loved Son to be our Savior. Thank you for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to let us be born again into eternal life! May we rely on the power of the Spirit to walk and live in the light and follow Jesus every day of our lives. As disciples of Jesus, equip us to be agents of restoration to a dark world so that many may be saved and experience Spiritual Transformation through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

LIVING WIDER

You Must Be Born again
Regeneration: How Christ Changes Your Soul
John 3:7
by Colin S. Smith

“Jesus said ‘You must be born again.’” John 3:7

John tells us the story of how a man called Nicodemus came to meet with Jesus. We are told that this man was “a man of the Pharisees,” and he was “a member of the Jewish ruling council” (v1).

That means that he was a man of integrity and that he was a highly successful man who was respected, trusted, and held in high regard in the community. More than that, he was drawn to Jesus. He wanted to learn from Jesus. He felt that he could talk with Jesus, and he came to Him one night looking for a private conversation.

Nicodemus had already come to some very positive conclusions about Jesus. He believes Jesus has come “from God” and that God is “with Him,” and He affirms the authenticity of our Lord’s miracles, and the truth of His teaching (v2). We should recognize this man. Most of us are like him.

The Master Builder interrupts our plans

“He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him...” John 3:1-2 (NIV)

Before Nicodemus can get any further Jesus interrupts him, stops him dead in his tracks... “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3).

This is an extraordinary statement. If you are going to see God and live in the glory of His eternal rule, if the joys of heaven are to be yours, here is what must happen, not only for you, but for every person who has ever lived—You must be born again!

Imagine that you spend your whole life building a house. The house is a life project for you. You build it from the foundation up—every nail, every screw. You go for quality in everything you choose: Fixtures, fittings, draperies. Everything that is in that house is a reflection of you and your commitment to excellence.

The house is your joy. It reflects your craftsmanship, your style, and your values. It is the fruit of your labor over years, as you have continued to make improvements, incorporating new ideas.

One day you meet a master builder. You have read about his work in magazines, so you invite him to come over and look at your house. You want to know if there is anything that he would do different—change some fittings, move the deck—perhaps even open up a wall. What could he suggest that would make your house even better?

He comes in and he's very quiet. He looks round, shakes his head and says "This is a tear-down." That's devastating... a tear-down? I have put my life into this house!

Jesus offers a new life, not a better one

That is what's happening here for this highly successful man who is trusted and respected in the community. Jesus says to him "You have come to me, thinking that I can add something that is missing in your successful life. I am telling you that your whole life needs to be made again, begun again, lived again. You must be born again."

A lot of us are like Nicodemus. You have a good education. Your achievements are solid. Your relationships are healthy. Your work ethic is sound. Your example is respected. And you want to reach higher. So if someone says "There's a God-shaped hole in your life and Jesus Christ can fill it," that makes sense to you. There's always more. Your life isn't perfect. You have faults. There are some things in your life that you need God to forgive.

A message that says "We need Christ to make us complete," makes sense to the natural man. It appeals to our pride. Let Christ fill the God-shaped hole in your life! But that is not what Jesus says here. Christ does not say "You are doing great, but there's something missing that I can give you."

He says "Your whole life needs to be remade and relived. You must be born again. AND, unless that happens you cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus, you came to me thinking you are somewhere close to God's Kingdom. I'm telling you that you're nowhere near!" That is devastating.

Don't miss the stunning fact that Jesus says this to Nicodemus. Who would be surprised if He said this to the thief on the cross—a criminal who had wasted his life? No one would be surprised if Jesus said this to the prostitutes or the tax collectors—who were notorious for extorting money from the people.

But Jesus did not say this to them. He says it to Nicodemus—man at his best, most ethical, most successful, and most educated. Jesus says this to trusted, respected, successful, moral, suburban family men and women like us. “You must be born again. Unless you are, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

The Change that Needs to Happen in Your Life...
...is More Radical than You Thought

Do you see yourself here? Here is a successful man who is drawn to Jesus and thinks that Jesus can add something to his life. Do you see what Jesus is saying to you? “You must be born again. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

Are you on the same page as Jesus? Will you agree with Him today, that the change that needs to happen in your life is more radical than you thought? Perhaps you came to church today thinking you are very near to God’s kingdom. The first thing Christ tells you is “You are nowhere close!” He says that to the best of us. He says that to you!

You’re never too old for the new birth

Jesus says “Your whole life needs to be remade and relived. You must be born again. And... unless that happens you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus says “My whole life remade and relived? How can that possibly happen? How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” (v4).

Nicodemus is a mature man. Youngsters didn’t get on the Jewish ruling council. In asking “How can a man be born again when he is old?” Nicodemus gives away his life stage. You can see the point of his question. As you get older, the shape of your life begins to set—the cement hardens. Over time, you come to terms with who you are.

It’s good to see younger people professing faith in Christ, and being baptized, but how can a man or woman in their fifties, sixties, seventies or eighties be born again? How could the very core identity of your life change? Years have gone. You cannot get them back. Your life is what it is. “How can a man be born again when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

What is this new birth?

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’” John 3:5 (NIV)

What in the world is Jesus talking about? Some think Jesus is saying in order to enter the kingdom of God you must have both a natural birth (the waters) and a spiritual birth. But since every living person has a natural birth, why not just say “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of the Spirit.”

Others think that Jesus is referring to baptism—baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit. The problem with that is that baptism reflects the new birth; it does not bring the new birth. Besides, making entrance into Christ’s kingdom conditional on baptism would be out of line with the teaching of the New Testament.

When Jesus says “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit” he is reflecting the twin blessings of the Gospel that we find throughout the Bible: A new cleansing, and a new creation.

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:25-26). It’s more than washing. You need more than a second chance. You need a new cleansing and a new creation. You need forgiveness and you need new life. You need justification and you need regeneration.

These are the twin blessings of the Gospel and I think that is what Jesus is saying here. “You must be born of water and of the Spirit.” You must be washed clean and you must be made new. How does this new birth happen? Jesus says “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit” (v6). This new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit.

How does the Spirit bring about the new birth? You might think that Jesus would say “Ok, Nicodemus, you want to be born again? Here are the three steps...” But He doesn’t do that. Instead, He says “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (v8).

What kind of an answer is that? The Holy Spirit gives new birth and He moves like the wind. You don’t control what the wind does, and you can’t predict where the wind will go.

The Change that Needs to Happen in Your Life...is Beyond Your Power.

“How can this be?” John 3:9 (NIV)

You cannot give yourself this new birth. “Flesh gives birth to flesh... (v6). Everything that you give birth to is an expression of who you are. All you can do is all you can do! Only God can bring the change that needs to happen in your life.

“Nicodemus, you must be born again! That’s what needs to happen in your life. Please understand—this does not lie in your power.” It’s not surprising that Nicodemus said “How can this be?” (v9).

First the diagnosis, then the Gospel

Notice that “You must be born again” is not the Gospel. It is the problem to which the Gospel is the answer. If you tell someone “You must be born again,” and that is all you tell them, you have not told them the Gospel. All you have done is told them the problem. That’s like a doctor giving a diagnosis without offering a prescription.

When Jesus says to Nicodemus “You must be born again,” He is identifying the problem: “The change that needs to happen in your life is more radical than you thought, AND it is beyond your power.” You can’t end there.

When Nicodemus says “How can this be?” How can I be born of the Spirit? He is not yet responding to the Gospel. He’s responding to Jesus’ diagnosis: The house that you’ve been building your whole life needs to be torn down.

Before we see where Jesus goes next, seeing where He does NOT go will help us avoid two mistakes in evangelism:

-Jesus does not say: “Well it’s all up to you. It depends on your faith and your response, and your repentance and your obedience.” He confronts Nicodemus with his own inability.

-Jesus does not say: “Well, it’s all up to God. It all depends on whether you are elect, whether or not you are predestined and, of course, there is nothing you can do about that.”

This whole conversation seems like a dead end, and it is—except for one thing. Notice where Jesus takes the conversation:

Jesus Christ was Lifted Up to Bring...
...the Change that Needs to Happen in Your Life

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:13-15 (NIV)

Jesus says two things about Himself: He is “the one who came from heaven.” That makes Him different from any of us and different from any other religious teacher or leader. He is in a category all His own, unlike anyone else who has ever lived.

Jesus uses the words “lifted up,” to describe His death on the cross. “When I am lifted up... I will draw all men to myself.” Then John adds “He said this to indicate the kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:32, see also John 8:28).

Come with me and look

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert...”
John 3:14 (NIV)

Jesus used an Old Testament story to help us understand the significance of His death and what it can mean for us. (You can read this story in Numbers 21:4-9)

The whole community of Israelites in the desert was angry and frustrated. “They spoke against God and against Moses...” (v5). The Lord sent venomous snakes among them and many people died (v6). This was a terrible curse. It threatened to wipe out the whole community right there in the desert.

The people came to Moses and said “We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you” (v7). So, Moses prayed for the people. God said to Moses “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live” (Numbers 21:8).

Jesus uses this story as an illustration to help us understand His death on the cross. “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

Notice the parallel: Moses says “Anyone can look at the snake and live.” Jesus says “Everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.” In other words, looking at the snake on the pole is a picture of what it means to believe in Jesus Christ and His death for us on the cross.

I picture people writhing in pain from these venomous snakes, legs and arms swelling from the poison. Death is near. Someone says “Moses has lifted up a pole at the center of the camp. There’s a bronze snake on it. People who look at the snake are recovering. Come with me, and look at the snake.” Would you have done that?

The image on the pole must have been repulsive—it’s the snake that bit me. And so is the Gospel: “The change needed in your life is far more radical than you thought and it is completely beyond your power. Eternal life comes through one man who died on a cross, bearing the curse of your sins. Look to Jesus Christ crucified as your only hope.” To millions of people in the world that is utterly repulsive.

But Moses tells us “When anyone looked at the bronze snake, he lived” (Numbers 21:9). And Jesus says “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Look to Me!

I want to end with the marvelous story of the conversion of C. H. Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the 20th century. I was reminded of this story again this week in reading a message by John Piper.

I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm, one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little primitive Methodist chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people... The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach... He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:22).

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: “My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a great deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to college to learn to look. You may be

the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look."

"But then the text says 'Look unto Me...' Many of ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. Ye will never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says 'Look unto Me.' Some of ye say 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin'. You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says 'Look unto Me.'"

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: "Look unto Me; I am sweatin' and great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I dare say, with so few present he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart he said "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued "and you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved."

Then lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a primitive Methodist could do "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but to look and live." I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" What a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could have almost looked my eyes away.

There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to him... Now I can say—

*E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And Shall be till I die.*

I urge you today: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to Him and live.

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MEMORY VERSE

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” John 4:23-24

1. Summarize this passage in your own words:

2. Context: In John 4, we see Jesus having a conversation with a Samaritan woman. Does the text indicate that it would be unusual for a Jewish man to be seen speaking with a Samaritan woman in this situation? Where?

4. What strikes you about what Jesus says to the woman?

5. How can you apply this passage to being a disciple and/or making disciples?

DIGGING DEEPER

We will see from the example of Jesus that evangelism was not just what he did, but who he was. This was a part of his life. We see that first, evangelism begins with a personal relationship.

Jesus was a master at building personal relationships. He met people where they were at, loved them and communicated a simple message.

To look at how we can make outreach an everyday lifestyle, turn in your Bibles to John 4.

8. What does the woman do after her encounter with Jesus (v. 39-42)?

9. What questions does this passage raise for you about evangelism?

10. What in this passage can you apply in your life right now (e.g., sin to confess, action to do, areas to grow, etc.)?

LIVING WIDER

What Evangelism Isn't (we need to stop mistaking other Christian activities for the spreading of the gospel) by Mark Dever

I remember as a little child hugging my father's leg at a gas station only to realize it wasn't his leg I was hugging. I was embarrassed! It was a case of mistaken identity.

In the matter of evangelism, I'm concerned about a number of things that people take to be evangelism that aren't. And this case of mistaken identity can have consequences more serious than mere embarrassment. Let me mention five things mistaken for evangelism.

Imposition

Probably the most common objection to evangelism today is, "Isn't it wrong to impose our beliefs on others?"

Some people don't practice evangelism because they feel they are imposing on others. And the way evangelism is often done, I can understand the

confusion! But when you understand what the Bible presents as evangelism, it's really not a matter of imposing your beliefs.

It's important to understand that the message you are sharing is not merely an opinion but a fact. That's why sharing the gospel can't be called an imposition, any more than a pilot can impose his belief on all his passengers that the runway is here and not there.

Additionally, the truths of the gospel are not yours, in the sense that they uniquely pertain to you or your perspective or experience, or in the sense that you came up with them. When you evangelize, you are not merely saying, "This is how I like to think of God," or "This is how I see it." You're presenting the Christian gospel. You didn't invent it, and you have no authority to alter it.

Personal Testimony

One of the classic testimonies was given by a blind man Jesus healed. When he was questioned after Jesus healed him, he responded, "Whether he [Jesus] is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25). The man disregarded the menacing threats of those more honored and respected than he in order to give this verbal witness to the power of God. It's a wonderful, powerful testimony, but it's not evangelism. There is no gospel in it. The man didn't even know who Jesus was.

An account of a changed life is wonderful and inspiring thing, but it's the gospel of Jesus Christ that explains what it's all about and how it happened.

Social Action and Public Involvement

Being involved in mercy ministries may help to commend the gospel, which is why Jesus taught, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Displaying God's compassion and kindness by our actions is a good and appropriate thing for Christians to do. But such actions are not evangelism. They commend the gospel, but they share it with no one. To be evangelism, the gospel must be clearly communicated, whether in written or oral form.

When our eyes fall from God to humanity, social ills replace sin, horizontal problems replace the fundamental vertical problem between us and God, winning elections eclipses winning souls.

Apologetics

Other people mistake apologetics for evangelism. Like the activities we've considered above, apologetics itself is a good thing. We are instructed by Peter to be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have (1 Pet. 3:15). And apologetics is doing exactly that. Apologetics is answering questions and objections people may have about God or Christ, or about the Bible or the message of the gospel. Answering questions and defending parts of the good news may often be a part of conversations Christians have with non-Christians, and while that may have been a part of our own reading or thinking or talking as we came to Christ, such activity is not evangelism.

Apologetics can present wonderful opportunities for evangelism. Being willing to engage in conversations about where we came from or what's wrong with this world can be a significant way to introduce honest discussions about the gospel.

By far the greatest danger in apologetics is being distracted from the main message. Evangelism is not defending the virgin birth or defending the historicity of the resurrection. Apologetics is defending the faith, answering the questions others have about Christianity. It is responding to the agenda that others set. Evangelism, however, is following Christ's agenda, the news about him. Evangelism is the positive act of telling the good news about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation through him.

The Results of Evangelism

Finally, one of the most common and dangerous mistakes in evangelism is to misinterpret the results of evangelism—the conversion of unbelievers—for evangelism itself, which is the simple telling of the gospel message. Who can deny that much modern evangelism has become emotionally manipulative, seeking simply to cause a momentary decision of the sinner's will, yet neglecting the biblical idea that conversion is the result of the supernatural, gracious act of God toward the sinner?

When we are involved in a program in which converts are quickly counted, decisions are more likely pressed, and evangelism is gauged by its immediately obvious effect, we are involved in undermining real evangelism and real churches.

The Christian call to evangelism is a call not simply to persuade people to make decisions but rather to proclaim to them the good news of salvation in

Christ, to call them to repentance, and to give God the glory for regeneration and conversion. We don't fail in our evangelism if we faithfully tell the gospel to someone who is not converted; we fail only if we don't faithfully tell the gospel at all. Evangelism itself isn't converting people; it's telling them that they need to be converted and telling them how they can be.

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DISCUSS

1. According to the article, what is not evangelism?

2. Is it realistic to expect Jesus' methods of evangelism to be effective in today's culture? Why or why not?

3. What steps will our church need to take in order to be more effective in discipleship?

FOLLOW UP

1. Read Lifestyle Evangelism by Joe Aldrich
2. Read The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert Coleman
3. Purchase The NIV Application Commentary by Gary Burge for further study in John.

Healing and Compassion

John 5:1-15

SUMMARY POINTS

Memory Verse: John 5:8

Digging Deeper: John 5:1-15

Living Wider: *Invictus*, by Brave Saint Saturn

BIG IDEA

God has compassion for the hurting world, and offers something that the law cannot: a transformed life.

MEMORY VERSE

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’” John 5:8

As with raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus’ word accomplished his will. The man had the desire to be healed, but not the means. Jesus enabled him to be healed. This is like the transformation Christ offers, when people obey His command to believe and follow, they are saved.

In place of weakness, Jesus gave the man strength. This reflects the life-giving power of Jesus. Jesus had probably never met the man face to face, yet he knew everything about the man. This reflects Jesus’ divine nature. The man’s rising and walking at the command of Jesus symbolizes both overcoming death at conversion and later at the resurrection.

1. Summarize this passage in your own words.

2. How can you apply this passage to being a disciple and/or making disciples?

3. Are there any areas in your life in which you have the desire but lack the means to change?

4. Do you believe Christ can empower you to change? Why or why not?

DIGGING DEEPER

This passage contains two issues that Jesus and His detractors clashed on throughout Jesus' earthly ministry: observance of the sabbath, and Jewish law.

The events in this passage took place on a sabbath day. The Law of Moses commanded that the Sabbath should be a day of rest that would allow time for worship and joy, a day that work would cease (see Exodus 20:8). Jewish religious authorities later added additional laws, referred to as rabbinic law, making the task of resting on the Sabbath complicated and even burdensome. Provisions were made for physicians, but only in the case of treating a life threatening ailment. Jesus healing the lame man was in violation of rabbinic law, and so was the formerly lame man carrying his bedroll.

The pool called Bethesda is likely a mineral or hot spring. This type of healing pool was common in the Middle East during the time and they were places where people with limited access to medical help could seek relief from their ailments. People who were ill or infirm congregated at these sights. Modern archeologists have found five porches during excavation near the temple in Jerusalem, confirming John's description. John is describing a real place, but the number might also have been an allusion to the five books of Moses, the books of law. Through His ability to heal when the pool did not, Jesus is shown to be greater than local tradition and the law.

It is important to remember that Jesus did not heal the man who was lame to spurn Jewish religious authorities. It was out of compassion that Jesus healed the man, and to show His power as God to change our lives. When Jesus meets the man again, he tells the man to “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” Jesus is not saying that the man’s impairment would return if he was not a “good boy”. Rather, Jesus, having already healed the man’s body, wanted to heal his soul as well. Without God’s gift of salvation, thirty-eight years of suffering in this life cannot compare to an eternity apart from God in hell.

1. Read John 5:1-15. How do you act when you are ill? How would you respond if someone asked, “Do you want to be well?”
2. What do you need in order to face and/or deal with the difficulties in you own life?
3. Are there any situations in your own life that you need healing or strength from God right now? Explain.
4. What are some reasons why people sometimes care more about adhering to the rules and laws of religion than cultivating a relationship with God?
5. Are there any religious rules or understandings that inhibit you from developing a greater relationship with God?

6. What in this passage can you apply to your life right now (e.g., sin to confess, action to do, areas to grow, etc.)?

LIVING WIDER

The following is a song by the Christian band Brave Saint Saturn. The plight of the marginalized, Christians' apathy towards them, and hope for both groups in Christ are reoccurring themes in Brave Saint Saturn's music. The type of church we want to build is one of compassion, one that offers hope, and one that does so by relying on God. John 5:1-15 paints a picture of ill and broken people seeking relief from their suffering, and this aptly reflects the state of our world. The song *Invictus* is the songwriter's plea to save him from his suffering and his decision to "rise up," follow, and serve the One who holds the only hope for him and for humanity.

Invictus

I've been breaking my back
Only to show You how very lost one can be
And bitterness fires through me
The brilliance that was is flickering cold
Slowly burning to ash
I'm choking on pride, I'm closing my eyes
Till one day I'm scared to go back

You part the shadows
Light of the world
Destroy the blindness
Peace eternal

Take this broken heart
If it brings You praise
Take this beaten soul

Shivering hands I will raise
Hope unstoppable
Sing the morning sun:
'Wake up, oh sleeper
The daylight has come'

You are, You are
Invincible
You are, You are
Unbreakable

I've been breaking my back
Only to show You how very lost one can be

DISCUSS

1. How does this song relate to John 5:1-15?

2. Is there anything in the words and meaning of this song that you can apply to your own life?

3. Please offer this excerpt as a group prayer:

*Take these broken hearts
If they bring You praise
Take this beaten souls
Shivering hands we will raise
Hope unstoppable
Sing the morning sun:
'Wake up, oh sleeper
The daylight has come'*

FOLLOW UP

1. Read John 5:1-15 and think about how you can help give strength to others.
2. Listen to the song *Invictus* at:
http://new.music.yahoo.com/brave-saint-saturn/albums/anti-meridian--202236765;_ylt=AlvkZiRtpsNC2sUn7t50oDbHxCUv
3. Think about how this week's passage relates to the passages previous weeks.

God's Provision

John 6:1-71

SUMMARY POINTS

Memory Verse: John 6:68-69

Digging Deeper: John 6:1-71

Living Wider: Who is Jesus by Mark Driscoll

BIG IDEA

God is the provider of every earthly and spiritual need.

1. List some of the major needs of your life (physical, spiritual, emotional, etc.).

2. How do you try to fulfill those needs?

3. Do you ever feel that your needs are so pressing, or that filling them is hopeless, even for God? Explain.

4. Which "needs", if any, could you live without?

5. Do you think God is concerned about your needs? Which ones? How do you know? Does He place priority on certain needs over others? If so, which ones?

MEMORY VERSE

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:68-69

1. According to 6:2, why were the people following Jesus?

2. What is your motivation for following Jesus at this point in your life?

3. What impact could these two verses have on your life, if you really believed them as Peter did?

5. Summarize this passage in your own words:

6. How can you apply this passage to being a disciple and/or making disciples?

DIGGING DEEPER

We find the multitudes of people in chapter 6 following after Jesus, amazed by the miracles that Jesus performed on the sick (6:2). However, Jesus knows that many of these initial followers are not true disciples. As with the people of the first century, we find Jesus trying to move us from earthly understandings of God's provision to the more important eternal perspective.

1. Read John 6:1-71. Describe the events in your own words.
2. At what time of the year does this chapter take place (6:4)? How does this Jewish holiday relate to the events at hand? In other words, what does Jesus do that mirrors the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread's origins?
3. Describe three (3) miracles that Jesus performed. What do these miracles tell us about Jesus?
4. How has God provided for you? Do you understand that everything comes from God (c.f. James 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:17)?
5. What was the response of the people to the miraculous provision (6:14-15, 26)?

6. What has been your response to God's provision in your life? What response does Jesus want you to have (6:27-29, 35-40)?

7. How is Jesus describing himself as the ultimate provision from God?

8. Why do you think so many followers turned back from Jesus at this point (6:66)? What keeps you from following Jesus wholeheartedly?

9. What questions does this passage raise for you about being a disciple of Jesus?

10. What in this passage can you apply in your life right now (e.g., sin to confess, action to do, area to grow, attitude to change, etc.)?

LIVING WIDER

1. Read the article here: <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/deeper-walk/blog/19069-jesus-is-not-political>

Since we have been discussing the difference between having an earthly perspective and a heavenly perspective on Jesus, how does your conclusion affect the way you view the church's role in political issues?

2. If it is possible for people to come to Jesus initially, and then turn away, then how does God go about saving people? What are the factors that bring people from being initial followers to becoming lifelong disciples of Christ. Some places in the New Testament you might read are Romans 8-11, Hebrews (especially chapter 6), the Book of James, and the first letter of John (1 John).

Who Is Jesus?

John 7:25-44

Summary Points

Memory Verse: John 7:37-38,40-41

Digging Deeper: John 7:1-52

Living Wider:

BIG IDEA

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? Is He a just a carpenter, a good man, a great teacher? Or is He something more? Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

MEMORY VERSE

Jesus has been teaching in the temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. Finally, on the last day of the feast, Jesus cries out with a great proclamation about the Holy Spirit and a challenge to believe in Him.

“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’...

“On hearing his words, some of the people said, ‘Surely this man is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘He is the Christ’.” John 7:37-38, 40-41

1. Context: In John 7, we see people arguing about who Jesus is. Who are the various groups of people you see and what are the various opinions they have about him?

2. Summarize this passage in your own words:

3. How can you apply this passage to being a disciple and/or making disciples?

DIGGING DEEPER

The historical background of John 7 is the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) which takes place in the 7th month of the Jewish calendar from the 15-22 (Sept/Oct). Jesus goes up to Jerusalem secretly because the Jews are seeking to kill him. Controversy is swirling around in the crowds because people are arguing about who Jesus really is. Suddenly in the middle of the feast Jesus appears and begins to teach openly in the temple. On the last day of the feast there is a ceremonial water drawing (commemorating God's provision of water for the Israelites in the desert during the time of the exodus). At this very time Jesus stands up and declares himself to be the source of living water to all who will believe in him. Some of the people believe that Jesus is the Christ while others do not believe. As you read through John 7 you will notice that the primary topic or question is: "Who is Jesus?" This question is not just central to this chapter it is central to the whole book.

The apostle John's purpose in writing his gospel is to prove that Jesus is both God and man. This purpose permeates the whole book. In John 1:1 Jesus is portrayed as the eternal Word who is God. In John 1:18 he is called the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him. John the Baptist in Jn 1:34 testifies that he is the Son of God. Jesus himself declares Himself to be the "I am" of Ex 3:14 in numerous places like John 8:12, 28, 58; 6:35, 48, 51; 10:11, 14, etc. Thomas also calls Jesus God in John 20:28 when he refers to him as "My Lord and my God!" All of these verses declare Jesus to be truly divine. In John 1:14, Jesus is called "the Word which became flesh and dwelt among us". John the baptist calls him the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world in John 1:29. Nathanael calls him the King of Israel. He is called Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph in John 1:45. All of these verses declare Jesus to be fully human. Nathanael refers to both his deity and his humanity when he calls Jesus the Son of God and the King of Israel in John 1:49. John the apostle also refers to Jesus' deity and His humanity in John 20:31 when he declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

1. Read John 7:1-9. Why don't Jesus' brothers believe in him? What do they want him to do and what's his response to them?

2. Read John 7:10-24. Why does Jesus go up to the Feast of Tabernacles secretly and then go into the temple and teach openly?

3. What are the reasons for the controversy over Jesus? Comment on the Statement: "The Jews were amazed" at His teaching.

4. Read John 7:25-31. The people are arguing about whether Jesus is the Christ or not and they are definitely confused. Why doesn't he clearly state whether he is the Christ or not?

5. Read John 7:32-36. This is the first time in John's gospel where the Jewish rulers and authorities are involved in the controversy over Jesus' identity. What is their opinion about him? Why does Jesus always seem to speak to them in riddles or in hard to understand statements rather than in plain speech?

6. Read John 7:37-39. What is the promise given in this passage and to whom is it given?

7. Read John 7:40-44. This passage spells out the answer to the question: “Who is he?” Do you really believe that Jesus is the Christ? What implications does this truth have?

8. Read John 7:45-52. The religious leaders and the officers seem to be divided over who Jesus is. Why does Jesus always seem to cause division and controversy? Why do you think the officers believe in him and the Jewish rulers reject him?

9. Are the religious leaders right in rejecting Jesus? Are their reasons for doing so correct or biblical? Explain.

10. Have you come to the conclusion through your own study that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Are you willing to make him the Lord of your life? Why or why not? What does this look like in your life?

LIVING WIDER

Listen to these quick explanations on who Jesus is by Mark Driscoll.

<http://reelit.org/vintagejesus/downloads.php>

Appendix

Extra resources to help in your discipleship journey
