



**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

**LIFE GROUPS  
LEADER GUIDE  
MAY 2021**

|             |               |                      |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------|
| LIFE GROUPS | TEACHING PLAN |                      |
|             | FW            | <i>Study of John</i> |
|             | MAY 2         | 21                   |

# THE TRANSFORMATION OF NEW BIRTH

JOHN 3:1-36

MAY 2, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 3:1-36. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: TRUE LIFE CHANGE DOES NOT BEGIN BY SIMPLY CHANGING OUR CIRCUMSTANCES OR BEHAVIORS, BUT RATHER WITH A HEART CHANGED BY JESUS CHRIST THROUGH FAITH IN HIM.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: UNLESS A PERSON IS BORN AGAIN, THEY WILL NOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

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GOSPEL CONNECTION: WE ARE BORN AGAIN THROUGH THE FINISHED WORK OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

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## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

### Notes:

- 1 How do you typically react to change? Do you enjoy change or does it make you nervous? What does this say about your personality?
- 2 What is the biggest life change you've been through recently? What do you remember most about that experience?
- 3 For Christians, our conversion (when we entered into a personal relationship with Jesus through belief in Him as Savior and Lord) is the biggest change that has taken place in our lives. What are some ways you were changed when you met Christ?

An honest assessment of human nature shows that we have a notoriously fickle relationship with change. Sometimes we crave it; sometimes we loathe it. Regardless of our preferences toward change in general, it is an essential part of becoming and growing as a Christian. This study of John 3 shows us that real change begins and ends with faith in Jesus.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:1-8.

- What do we learn about Nicodemus in these verses? What was missing in his life, according to Jesus (v. 3)?

- What do you believe Jesus meant about having to be born again to see the kingdom of God?

**Notes:**

To be “born again” means to experience a birth from above. Jesus was talking about salvation. *Salvation* is the term for the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of an individual to bring them into the family of God. This happens when a person expresses belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection and accepts His role as Savior and Lord of their lives. Only those who believe in Jesus can be saved from sin (all the ways we disobey God) and enjoy eternal life with Him. Before we’re born again, we may have a clue that something isn’t right, and our lives have to change.

- Read Genesis 3:22-23 from the story of the fall of man and when sin first entered the world. What consequences did Adam and Eve face as a result of their sin?
- What does it mean to be separated from something? Why do you think separation from God was the punishment for the first sin? How does this separation affect us today?
- How have you seen sin distort or twist people’s identities, including your own? Spend a few minutes discussing the impact of sin in our world, creation, and your personal life.

We have all rebelled against God. It started with Adam and Eve (the first humans) in the garden of Eden, when they doubted God’s goodness. And we’ve continued the streak of thinking our ways are better ever since. Thankfully, our spiritual story does not stop with this dark picture of sin. From the beginning of creation, God had a plan to save us by His great grace. The term *grace* refers to the good favor God shows to us by offering us a relationship with Him, through Jesus, even though we are sinful people by nature and don’t deserve it. That grace is the foundation of real life change.

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> HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:16-21.

God's mercy, love, and grace bring about change. Mercy is the disposition to act compassionately in response to the plight of others in need. God's love is the John 3:16 kind of love, in which God sacrificed His Son for sinners to have life. Grace describes God's undeserved favor toward all who have sinned against Him. Christ did not die for us when we were worthy of being saved; He died when we were at our absolute worst—broken and hopeless.

**Notes:**

- What does it mean to “believe” in Jesus? Why is this so important?
- How does Nicodemus's story help us understand the type of real life change God wants to do in our lives?
- What words from this passage help us understand the manner of God's love for us?
- What affect does God's mercy, love, and grace have on your relationship with Him? What affect can it have on your relationship with others?

God's love made salvation available to the whole world through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus, who paid the price for our sins. But salvation comes only to those who believe in Christ and His death on the cross (3:18). When we believe in Him, we are restored in our relationship with God and no longer separated from Him or under His judgment. The result of this restoration is eternal life, meaning that after our physical death, we will live forever in the presence of God. John was writing about changed lives—the message of Jesus to Nicodemus. Salvation is the work of God internally through the Holy Spirit, which demonstrates itself outwardly in godly living.

- According to Jesus' words in verses 19-21, what is the evidence for true belief?

**Notes:**

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:22-36.

John the Baptist was baptizing people for repentance. He was making the path clear for the coming of the Messiah. The people's lives then were cluttered with selfishness, sin, and pride—much like they are now. John told them to repent of it. John was removing stumbling blocks of self-righteousness. He was clearing out their hearts of self-justification. He was preparing them for the salvation that comes by casting oneself on the mercy of Christ.

- What do you suppose the argument about purification was all about?
- How are we purified before God today? Why is it necessary for this to happen?

Most likely, the quarrel about purification arose over how one is to be purified of uncleanness and sin. The religious leaders taught that one had to keep the law, and even laws about the law to be pure and undefiled before God. But John taught a different way to be clean: repent and look for the Messiah. The law could not and cannot make one clean before God. It only brings guilt. The only hope is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

- What does John's example teach you about your responsibility as a follower of Christ today?
- What are some of the temptations that make becoming less for Jesus to become more particularly hard for you to do?

Our duty as Christians is not to build our own little kingdoms and reputations. We are to point to Christ just as John the Baptist did. We want people to grow in their faith, and we should be happy when they do so even if we are not as popular as we think we ought to be.

**Notes:**

- How did Jesus come “from above”? Why would the truth that Jesus came from heaven give John great relief?
- How does this truth change our lives and our witness today?

Before the world was made, before God spoke and made light, and before anything at all was created—God the Son existed. God the Son existed with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is eternal. Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth to teach us truth and to show us the path of righteousness. We are helpless sinners who can only hope to live by the grace of the eternal God. This is why John the Baptist was relieved to see Jesus’ ministry growing. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. In humility, John realized that everyone would be better off going to Jesus instead of himself. It is tempting for us, as self-centered creatures, to think we know better than God. We second guess His Word. We think we will be happier disobeying His commands. We think we will find more joy living for our glory instead of His. But the reality is that we are all infinitely better off repenting and trusting in Christ. We will find more joy seeking His glory than our own.



## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

### Notes:

- When God shows His power in a person's life by saving him or her, what changes?
- What things cause you to not trust in God's ability to bring about change in your life?
- What would you say to people who believe God's grace can't provide forgiveness for their sins? Do you ever feel that way yourself?

## PRAY

Thank God for the simple truths of His gospel message—that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and restore us to God—and the confidence we can have in our salvation. Pray that in the midst of your roles that encompass family, work, and social contacts, you will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of the gospel by living in obedience to God.

## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

**Notes:**

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - How might you “decrease” this week and allow Christ to increase in you?
  - What ministries could you help or contribute to in order to put this into practice?
  
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
  
- > The challenge to memorize John 3:30.
  
- > The text for next week’s study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 4:1-54.

## JOHN 3:1-36

3:1–4:42. The bulk of chaps. 3 and 4 is devoted to Jesus’s encounters with Nicodemus, a representative of the Jewish religious establishment, and an unnamed woman representing Samaritan religion. Interspersed are explanatory sections (3:16–21, 31–36) and a vignette on John the Baptist (3:22–30). The encounters with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are a study in contrasts. Nicodemus’s status as a Sanhedrin member differs sharply from the lowly Samaritan woman who had a sinful past and present. Yet in both cases Jesus discerned deep spiritual need. He confronted Nicodemus about his need for regeneration and the woman about her sin.

**Notes:**

3:1. Nicodemus was a common name in first-century Palestine. Ruler of the Jews refers to the Jewish governing body known as the Sanhedrin.

3:2. Nicodemus’s coming to Jesus at night may have negative overtones (“night” is probably negative in 13:30 but not in 21:3; see also the reference to the present event without apparent negative connotation in 19:39). Coming from a “teacher of Israel” (3:10), the address rabbi denoted respect, especially since it was known that Jesus did not have formal rabbinic training (7:15). The signs mentioned in John’s Gospel presumably included those performed in Jerusalem (2:23), possibly the temple clearing (cp. 2:18; see note at 2:11).

3:3–8. The discussion of the need for spiritual rebirth develops the reference to the “children of God” who are “born ... of God” in the prologue (1:12–13). On “children of God,” see 8:39–58 and 11:51–52. The phrase born of water and the Spirit probably refers to spiritual birth that cleanses from sin and brings spiritual transformation (Ezk 36:25–27). The kingdom of God, a major topic in the other Gospels, is mentioned by John only in vv. 3, 5.

3:7. You is plural, probably indicating Nicodemus and other Sanhedrin members (cp. vv. 1, 11).

3:8. Jesus illustrated his pronouncement of vv. 3–5 with an analogy between wind and a person born of the Spirit. Wind and Spirit translate the same Greek and Hebrew words (Gk *pneuma*; Hb *ruach*). While the wind’s origin is invisible, its effects can be observed; it is the same with those born of the Spirit.

**Notes:**

3:9–10. Jesus may here be “returning the compliment” (see note at v. 2), though he chastised Nicodemus for his lack of understanding.

3:11–12. Jesus’s knowledge is firsthand rather than speculative or based on hearsay. The earthly things probably refers to the teaching on spiritual regeneration.

3:13. Jesus’s statement may allude to Pr 30:4. Only Jesus descended from heaven and returned there (Lk 24:51; Ac 1:9).

3:14–15. The reference to the Son of Man being lifted up is the first of three “lifted up” sayings in John (8:28; 12:32). All three speak of the future “lifting up” of the Son of Man in double meaning (possibly inspired by the language of Is 52:13). The reference in this verse invokes Moses’s lifting up of a serpent in the wilderness so that everyone who had been bitten by a poisonous snake and looked at the serpent in faith was healed (Nm 21:8–9). The third and final “lifted up” saying (Jn 12:32) emphasizes that the lifting up of the Son of Man refers to Jesus’s crucifixion (cp. 12:33 and the similar reference to Peter’s martyrdom in 21:19).

3:16–18. God, out of love, gave his one and only Son (cp. 1:14, 18), so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life (see notes at 5:26; 14:4–6). John’s favorite designation for Jesus is the Son sent by the Father (3:34–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1), imagery taken from the Jewish concept of the *shaliach* (messenger), according to which the sent one is like the sender himself and faithfully pursues the sender’s interests (13:16, 20). Jesus is that “sent one” par excellence (9:7), and he in turn sends his disciples. Being sent implies that the commission, charge, and message are issued by the sender rather than originating with the ones sent. The messengers’ role is to fulfill their commission according to their sender’s will.

3:22. Jesus left the vicinity of Jerusalem and headed to the Judean countryside. In 4:3, Jesus left Judea altogether, returning to Galilee (2:12) by way of Samaria.

3:23–25. The ministries of Jesus and John overlapped and led to a dispute between their respective disciples.

3:27. John points out that Jesus would not be having such success unless God was in it.

3:28. John's assertion that he had been sent ahead of the Messiah may allude to Mal 3:1 (cp. Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2; Lk 7:27).

3:29. John's reference to Jesus as the groom (cp. Mt 9:15) identified Jesus as Israel's long-awaited King and Messiah. In the OT, Israel is frequently depicted as God's "bride" (Is 62:4–5; Jr 2:2; Hs 2:16–20). John's role was that of the groom's friend, who selflessly rejoiced with the groom (1:6–9, 15, 19–36).

3:30. John the Baptist downplayed his disciples' concerns expressed in v. 26. Now that the light had come (1:6–9), the "lamp" had done its work.

3:31–32. The one who comes from above is Jesus. The earthly one is John the Baptist, but it speaks not of sin but of finiteness.

3:33. Has affirmed (Gk sphragizo) means literally "to seal" in the sense of confirming or authenticating something as true.

3:35. The Father has given the Son authority over all things because of his love.

3:36. Has eternal life indicates that eternal life is not just a future expectation but is already a present experience. The wrath of God remains on him makes clear that unless a person believes in Jesus the Messiah, he remains under God's judgment (vv. 19–21).

## Notes:

|             |               |                      |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------|
| LIFE GROUPS | TEACHING PLAN |                      |
|             | FW            | <i>Study of John</i> |
|             | MAY 9         | 21                   |

# THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

JOHN 4:1-54

MAY 9, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 4:1-54. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

**TAKEAWAY: ENGAGING THE LOST IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CHRIST CAN MOVE THEM BEYOND THEIR IMMEDIATE NEEDS TO MEETING THEIR ULTIMATE NEED.**

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**WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JUST AS CHRIST ENGAGED THE WOMAN IN CONVERSATION, BOTH REVEALING TRUTH AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT HIMSELF, CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS MUST ENGAGE THE LOST WORLD IN PURPOSEFUL CONVERSATIONS TO POINT THEM TO CHRIST.**

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**GOSPEL CONNECTION: WHAT JESUS OFFERS TO THOSE WHO COME TO HIM IS MORE SATISFYING THAN LIFE ITSELF.**

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## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

### Notes:

- 1 Can you remember a time when you had a really strange or awkward conversation? What happened?
- 2 What makes a conversation good or bad? Who is your favorite person to sit down and talk to? Why?

We all have favorite people to talk with—it could be a spouse, parent, or friend. Conversations go all sorts of directions, but the best conversations often have an intentional goal—a purpose that seeks to help and improve one or both people. Jesus had this type of conversation with a woman in Samaria.

The conversation transgressed virtually every social custom of Jesus' day, with regard to who Jewish men were permitted to interact with. Yet in the course of the conversation, not only did the Samaritan woman come to believe in Christ, but also the power of her testimony led others to Christ as well.



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## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

### Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 4:1-26.

Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem for Galilee, traveling by way of Samaria because it was the shortest route. Some Jews in those days frequently avoided the Samaritan route because they considered the people in the region to be unclean, based on the practice of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles in that region. Rather than go around, Jesus traveled through Samaria.

- Describe the woman Jesus met in this passage. What stands out to you about His interaction with her?

Jesus never did anything by accident. His travel plans were intentional. While some more religious and “observant” Jews would have avoided Samaria, Jesus knew that unclean Samaritans needed the grace of God every bit as much as religious Jews. Jesus initiated the conversation with the woman for one specific reason—to teach her about who He was and what He offers. Jesus could tell she had a spiritual thirst that He alone could satisfy.

- The Samaritan woman and Jesus had two differing concepts of “living water.” What were they, and upon what were they based? What made the living water Jesus described so attractive to the woman?
- What objections did the woman raise in verses 11-12? What did her comments reveal about her understanding of Jesus’ words?

Jesus talked about the water and described living water that gave new life, but the Samaritan woman thought He was referring to running water from a river or stream. The woman wanted living water that would never leave her thirsty so that she would not need to go to the well every day. Her focus was on her immediate physical needs. In our daily habits, we come across people who the world has beaten down and left lonely. They not only have physical needs, but they also have spiritual needs that only Christ can satisfy. Jesus used what started out as a “small talk” conversation to bridge into the truth about Himself. Notice that Jesus always met people where they were and built a bridge to take them to where He was. God sent Jesus to restore us and bring us back to Him; for the woman at the well, this conversation started her process of restoration.

**Notes:**

- What did Jesus’ words in verses 17-18 help the woman understand about her spiritual need? What did they help the woman understand about Jesus?
  
- What do you think it meant to this Samaritan woman that Jesus knew everything about her, yet still loved her?

The woman had been married five times and lived with a man who was not her husband. Jesus knew all about her past. By His request, He invited her to be honest with Him about her situation. The woman was caught in a deeply questionable lifestyle, but the way she was living did not incite Jesus’ condemnation. Instead, Jesus called her into a relationship with Him. In His teaching and mission, Jesus alienated far more religious people than people who knew they were sinners. Meeting people where they are without condemnation is the best way to put ourselves in a position where people are willing to hear from us. Jesus understood who this woman was; instead of being shocked and repulsed by her situation, He used it to lead her to find fullness in Him.

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> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 4:27-42.

- How did the disciples respond when they found Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman? Contrast this with the response the woman had after her conversation with Jesus.

**Notes:**

Frequently in the Gospels, the disciples showed an inadequate understanding of Jesus' mission, whereas the Samaritan woman understood the essence of Jesus' mission right away and it drove her to share that mission unashamedly with others. Jesus' revealing her sin to her did not lead to distress, but to repentance. Jesus desires His followers to share His mission in the places He has given them influence, which is exactly what Jesus would tell His disciples to do before He ascended to heaven (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus loved His disciples and this woman in spite of their failings.

- From the example of the woman at the well, what can we learn is a proper response to encountering Jesus?
  
- What is the connection between the teaching of Jesus and the mission of Jesus?

The teaching of Jesus is not a means to an end with us, but to work through us. Teaching leads to mission and mission leads to teaching. In many churches today we treat discipleship and mission as though they are separate, loosely connected things. Jesus' life shows us that the distinction between these two things is not as clear and defined as we like to make it. The woman heard and told, which led others to consider the claims of Jesus and see that he is the "Savior of the world" (v. 42). As disciples under the authority of Jesus, we call people into similar relationships with Jesus that we have found in Him. Once the teaching and mission of Jesus become the focal point of our lives, we have found God's purpose for our lives.

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> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 4:43-54.

In the passages leading up this incident, Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding in a Cana, and shared the gospel with both a religious leader and a social outcast. In this passage, Jesus was approached by a man from an entirely different part of the social sphere: a Roman official.

**Notes:**

- What would make the official think Jesus could heal his son? What misconceptions did he have about Jesus' power to heal?

When Jesus told the official, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe," He was saying something important. The official believed that Jesus could perform wonders, and that seems to be what His faith was in. He didn't trust Jesus, but only His power. Likewise, many may see the signs and wonders Jesus performed and marvel, but not direct their amazement toward the One performing the wonders.

- Verse 50 says the man believed the word that Jesus spoke. What does that tell us about where he put his faith? How are we called to respond in the same way?
- Why was the time the boy began to improve of significance to the father? How might that fact have affected his faith?

This story doesn't end simply on the good news of the official's son being made well. The entire household put their trust in Jesus! And an important truth is revealed in their faith: the gospel is for everyone who trusts in Him. There is no one who is excluded, no people group, no social class, no one. The gospel is for everyone, and that is the greatest act of compassion God could ever have shown us.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

### Notes:

- In what people or things are you most tempted to look for fulfillment instead of looking to Christ? How can we hold one another accountable to look only to Christ this week?
- How have you grown in your knowledge of Christ recently? What are some ways you have seen Him differently at different moments in your life? Who is someone you could share this with this week?
- How can our church be more intentional in the way we reach people who do not typically go to church?

## PRAY

Close your group time in prayer that group members would look only to Christ for fulfillment and purpose and would be bold enough to share the gospel with those who need to hear it.

## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

**Notes:**

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - Where are you tempted to look for satisfaction in life besides Jesus?
  - What is He calling you to submit to Him in this regard this week?
  
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
  
- > The challenge to memorize John 4:14.
  
- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 5:1-47.

## JOHN 4:1-54

4:1–42 Jesus’s encounter with the Samaritan woman took place by divine necessity (v. 4). Unlike Nicodemus, the woman progressed in her understanding. She viewed him first as a Jew (v. 9), then as someone who could make her life easier (v. 15), then as a prophet (v. 19), and then possibly as Messiah (v. 29). The woman’s fellow townspeople concluded that Jesus was the Savior of the world (v. 42).

**Notes:**

4:1 The Pharisees had investigated John the Baptist’s credentials (1:19, 24); now they were looking into those of Jesus.

4:2 John the Evangelist, author of this Gospel, here clarified the earlier statement in 3:26.

4:4 Had to travel may indicate that Jesus’s itinerary was set by the sovereign plan of God (9:4; 10:16; 12:34; 20:9). Through Samaria was the most direct route from Judea to Galilee, but strict Jews, wishing to avoid defilement, bypassed Samaria by taking a longer, less direct route. This involved crossing the Jordan River and traveling across from Samaria on the eastern side of the river.

4:5 Sychar was located just east of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The reference to the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph reflects the customary inference from Gn 48:21–22 and Jos 24:32 that Jacob gave his son Joseph the land at Shechem that he had bought from the sons of Hamor (Gn 33:18–19) and that later served as Joseph’s burial place (Ex 13:19; Jos 24:32).

4:6 Jesus was worn out from his journey. This underscores his genuine, full humanity.

4:7 The first sentence would have raised the question: What will Jesus do? Those who knew the Samaritans would have been shocked by Jesus’s request.

4:8 Jesus and his disciples usually carried little or nothing to eat on their journeys. Rather, they brought money to

buy provisions along the way (12:6; 13:29). Purchasing food was a common assignment given to disciples. Jesus did not fear being defiled by food bought in a Samaritan village.

**Notes:**

4:9 The author's aside that Jews do not associate with Samaritans explained to his Diaspora readership that rabbis considered Samaritans to be in a continual state of uncleanness.

4:10–15 The references to Jesus as the giver of living water involve double meaning. Literally, the phrase refers to fresh spring water (Gn 26:19; Lv 14:6). God was known as the source of life (Gn 1:11–12, 20–31; 2:7) and “the fountain of living water” (Jr 2:13; see Is 12:3). In Nm 20:8–11, water gushed out of the rock, a much-needed provision for the Israelites.

4:11 Jacob's well may have been the deepest well in Palestine. It is more than a hundred feet deep today and was probably deeper in Jesus's day.

4:12 The woman's account of Jacob giving the Samaritans the well and drinking from it himself was based on tradition, not Scripture. The book of Genesis does not record Jacob digging a well, drinking from it, and giving it to his sons.

4:14 The phrase will become a well of water springing up in him is reminiscent of Is 12:3 (cp. Is 44:3; 55:1–3).

4:16 Jesus's instructions gave the woman the opportunity to admit that she was living with a man who was not her husband.

4:17 While technically truthful, the woman's statement was potentially misleading because it could be taken to imply that she was unattached. Jesus knew the full truth.

4:18 The woman had had five husbands—or five “men” (the Gk *aner* can mean “husband” or “man”)—having engaged in a series of illicit relationships, and she was not



married to her current lover. Sexual relations outside of marriage are forbidden in both Testaments.

4:19 The woman recognized that Jesus knew her life circumstances without apparently having been told by anyone—hence he must be a prophet (cp. Lk 7:39).

**Notes:**

4:20–21 The fathers who worshiped on this mountain—a reference to Mount Gerizim (Dt 11:29; 27:12), the OT setting for the pronouncement of blessings for keeping the covenant, and the mountain on which Moses commanded an altar to be built (Dt 27:4–6)—included Abraham (Gn 12:7) and Jacob (Gn 33:20), who built altars in this region.

4:22 True worship must be based on true knowledge of God, and the Samaritans limited themselves to just the Pentateuch. Salvation is from the Jews means that in salvation history the Jews are the conduit through which salvation comes to the world.

4:23–24 Because God is spirit, the Israelites were not to make idols “in the shape of anything” as the surrounding nations did (Ex 20:4). Jesus’s point was that since God is spirit, proper worship of him is also a matter of spirit rather than physical location.

4:27 The disciples’ amazement that Jesus was talking with a woman stemmed from the common Jewish teaching that talking too much to a woman, even one’s wife, was a waste of time, diverting one’s attention from the study of Scripture and reflection on God.

4:28 The woman’s water jar was probably a large earthenware pitcher carried on the shoulder or hip. She abandoned her original purpose for coming to the well in order to tell her townspeople about Jesus.

4:29 Who told me everything I ever did was an exaggeration—but understandable in light of her excitement. See note at v. 39.

4:30 It is interesting that the woman had such credibility that people left their work to see the man she spoke of.

4:31 Rabbi, eat something reflected the disciples' customary concern for their Master's well-being. Jesus had been worn out from his journey before his conversation with the Samaritan woman (see note at v. 6). He still had not had anything to eat.

**Notes:**

4:32–34 The accomplishment of Jesus's mission was more important to him than physical food (Mt 6:25; Mk 3:20–21). His statement may echo Dt 8:3 (cp. Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4). On Jesus's work, see note at 17:4.

4:35 In agriculture there is always a considerable separation in time between sowing and harvesting. The disciples needed to realize that with the coming of Jesus, sowing (preaching) and reaping (conversions) coincided. The immediate reference may be to the approaching Samaritans (vv. 39–42).

4:36 This saying is reminiscent of Am 9:13, which depicted the prosperity of the new age. Hence Jesus claimed that he was ushering in the messianic age, a time of swift, abundant harvest.

4:37–38 This saying may allude to Mc 6:15, "You will sow but not reap." Yet Jesus's adaptation left judgment unmentioned. The others who had labored were Jesus and his predecessors, most recently John the Baptist, the final prophet associated with the OT era. Jesus's followers were the beneficiaries of their work and would bring in the harvest.

4:39 That town refers to Sychar (see note at v. 5). Though people would naturally be skeptical about religious pronouncements made by an immoral woman such as this Samaritan, her sincerity (and perhaps a noticeable change in her morality) convinced her townspeople to take her seriously as she spoke about Jesus.

4:40 Jesus obviously did not share in the Jewish bias against Samaritans since he spent two days with them (see notes at vv. 4, 9).

4:41–42 As others had done (1:40–41, 45), the woman brought people to Jesus so they could see for themselves. Ultimately, it was on the basis of a personal encounter with Jesus that they believed. His large harvest among the Samaritans marked the first sign of the universal scope of his saving mission (10:16; 11:51–52). The early church also undertook a Samaritan mission (Ac 8:4–25; cp. Ac 1:8). In fact, the pattern of Jesus’s mission from Judea (Nicodemus, Jn 3), to Samaria (Jn 4), to the Gentiles (vv. 46–54; cp. 12:20–33), anticipated the post-Pentecost mission of the early church (Ac 1:8).

4:43–54 The healing of the royal official’s son completes the “Cana cycle” in John’s Gospel, which spans from 2:1 to 4:54 and begins and ends with a “sign” performed by Jesus in Cana of Galilee (2:11; 4:54). The present sign is a rare instance of a long-distance healing performed by Jesus. The story resembles that of the Gentile centurion in Mt 8:5–13 and Lk 7:2–10, but this is not the same incident. All three signs featured in the Cana cycle (the turning of water into wine, the temple clearing, and the healing of the royal official’s son) set forth Jesus as the Messiah, who showed convincing proofs of his divine commission.

4:43 Jesus left there (Sychar) and entered Galilee. From Sychar to Cana was about forty miles, a trip of two or three days.

4:44 On a prophet’s lack of honor in his own country, compare Mt 13:57; Lk 4:24.

4:45 Jesus’s Galilean welcome must be understood in light of vv. 44 and 48 (cp. 2:23–25).

4:46 The royal official was probably a Gentile centurion, possibly in service to Herod Antipas (Mk 6:14). His son’s

## Notes:

illness involved fever (Jn 4:52) and appears to have been terminal (vv. 47, 49).

4:47 The distance from Capernaum to Cana was about fifteen miles. The journey was mostly uphill (see note at 2:12). Conversely, from Cana Jesus would come down to Capernaum.

**Notes:**

4:48 The expression signs and wonders probably harks back to the series of miracles performed by Moses at the exodus. Jesus rebuked people for their dependence on the miraculous; for John, miracles were “signs” pointing to Jesus’s messianic identity.

4:49–50 This is a rare instance of a long-distance miracle. A similar incident is described in Mt 8:5–13 and Lk 7:2–10. The words your son will live may recall Elijah’s statement in 1Kg 17:23. If so, Jesus’s messianic activity is compared with the healing ministry of Elijah (Lk 4:23–27).

4:54 The second sign refers to signs done in Cana; in the interim, Jesus had performed signs in Jerusalem (2:23; 3:2; 4:45). Thus John closed the cycle of Jesus’s first ministry circuit, starting and ending in Cana of Galilee (see note at vv. 43–54).

|             |               |                      |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------|
| LIFE GROUPS | TEACHING PLAN |                      |
|             | FW            | <i>Study of John</i> |
|             | MAY 16        | 21                   |

# HEALING WITH AUTHORITY

JOHN 5:1-47

MAY 16, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 5:1-47. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: AS GOD'S SON, JESUS HAS THE AUTHORITY TO DO ALL THAT THE FATHER ASKS.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JESUS' POWER AND AUTHORITY COMES FROM HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER.

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GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS' PERFECT OBEDIENCE TO THE FATHER LED HIM TO THE CROSS.

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## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

### Notes:

- 1 Has someone ever challenged your position of authority by asking, “What gives you the right to do this?” How did you respond? Have you ever asked that question of someone?
- 2 How do you answer this question about Jesus? What gives Him to the right to do everything He has done and is doing?

Those who have authority have the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. Often, we are grateful for those who have authority because they serve everyone else by casting vision and maintaining order in their organization. Other times we might feel (for a variety of reasons) that authority figures should not have authority to begin with.

In today’s passage, we’ll look at Jesus’ divine authority—an authority that was questioned by the established religious leaders of Jesus’ day. While some were grateful for Jesus’ leadership, cultural influencers and teachers questioned His right to claim the authority of God. Our goal is to understand the nature of Jesus’ authority and to grow in our loving obedience to Him.

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## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

### Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 5:1-18.

In this passage, Jesus healed a man who was sick for 38 years. The man had some kind of disability or paralysis. Sick people gathered at the pool of Bethesda because they believed that an angel would sometimes stir up the water of the pool and the first person to enter the water after this occurred would be healed. Jesus asked the man if he wanted to get well (v. 6). The man said he did not have anyone to help him get in the pool before someone else got in ahead of him. Then Jesus told him to get up and walk (v. 8), and the man was healed. Then Scripture says this happened on the Sabbath (v. 9). The issue of healing on the Sabbath became the primary source of conflict regarding Jesus' authority.

- Why did John specifically mention that this event happened on the Sabbath? What were God's people to do on this day?

The Sabbath was intended as a day of rest—it was a gift for man, made by God. On this day, God's people were to do no work, but there were no restrictions in the law about caring for the sick or helping others. The Pharisees had added their own traditions to God's Law, declaring even the tiniest violation a flagrant disregard for the Lord. By healing this man and calling him to walk and carry a mat on the Sabbath, Jesus was declaring His authority, and the Pharisees were enraged. What gave Jesus the right to do what He did?

- Why would Jesus' exercising His authority anger the Jewish leaders? Why did the Jewish leaders not think Jesus had the authority to do what He did?



- What was Jesus' explanation for why He healed the man on the Sabbath? What does this explanation reveal about the Father? How does this truth apply to us today?

**Notes:**

Jesus reaffirmed what the Jewish authorities also believed—that the Sabbath rest was built into creation because God created all things in six days, then rested on the seventh. That set the pattern for man to work six days then rest on the Sabbath. But Jesus also showed these theologians what they would have likely agreed to as well: that when the Bible says God rested on the seventh day, it doesn't mean that God ceased being active in the world. Jesus denied that God was some nebulous power who merely propped everything into place and set it in motion. Rather, He was affirming that God is the omnipotent Lord who governs moment by moment everything He makes.

A Jew would have agreed that God was providentially active on earth because a Jew understood that God's domain of authority is infinite, rising over the restrictions men face. Finite, restricted man must practice a Sabbath in recognition that God was ultimately Master of their domain, but God need not. But in verse 17 (and in other places throughout the Gospels), Jesus claimed that what was true for the Father and the Sabbath was true for Himself: "My Father is working until now, and I am working." In other words, Jesus declared that He had the authority of the Father to be at work in the world as God led Him to be. Jesus was equal with God.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 5:19-23.

- What is the nature of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son (v. 19)? Is Jesus capable of acting independently of the Father? Why or why not?

- How is it that Jesus can do what the Father does (v. 20)?

### Notes:

The basis for Jesus' authority is the Father's love for Him, manifested through the Father's nonstop communication to Jesus about all He does. In turn, Jesus demonstrates His love for the Father through perfect obedience, even to the point of death on the cross and the resurrection. So, because God perfectly loves the Jesus the Son, the Son perfectly loves the Father and lives obediently with the authority of the One who loves Him.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 5:24-47.

- What are some of the claims Jesus made about Himself in these verses?
- What is the difference between the judgment of Jesus and when we pass judgment on someone?

Jesus claimed He had the right of judgment, and then He backed up His claim by saying that His judgment was true and final because it was the very judgment of God. When we judge others, we might make all kinds of mistakes. We might judge based on pride, self-righteousness, or lack of information. But the judgment of God, and therefore Jesus, is perfectly holy. When we approach Jesus, we should know that He is more than a friend; He is the righteous Judge of all humanity.

- What are some of the witnesses Jesus talked about in these verses that validate who He is? Why do you think so many people, both then and now, don't believe what Jesus said about Himself despite the testimony of witnesses like these?

John the Baptist, His own works, God the Father, and the Scriptures written by Moses all bear witness to who Jesus truly is. But people have always refused to believe Jesus and these testimonies about Him. In these verses, Jesus flipped the question of who He is on its head. Because of these witnesses, it's not Jesus who is on trial; it's really the world, and these witnesses testify against the world that does not believe.

**Notes:**

- In these verses, how do you see the difference between knowing information about Jesus and actually believing in and following Him?
  
- Jesus told the people that if they truly believed in Moses, they would also believe in Him. Why is that true?

Jesus said all the Scriptures, even the Old Testament books that Moses wrote, brought testimony about Him. These people were experts in the writings of Moses, yet somehow missed Jesus. These verses were a warning to make sure that in the midst of their religious study, they didn't miss the faith that all the writings were leading them to.

Because we live in a world where there is so much information available about everything—including the Bible—we might treat reading the Bible like an intellectual or scientific exercise. We can diagnose it, cut it apart, and analyze it, but the point of the Scripture is to reveal to us the character and the will of God. Sitting right at the center of God's character and will is Jesus. These verses are a warning to us still today: Don't mistake knowing about Jesus for believing in and following Jesus.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

### Notes:

- Why can you trust Jesus' authority over your own life?
- In what areas of your life are you not trusting Jesus' authority? What steps do you need to take to submit to His loving leadership?
- Is there a non-Christian in your life who could benefit from understanding Jesus' loving authority? Pray for an opportunity to share with them this week.

## PRAY

Give thanks for Jesus' loving obedience to the Father and the authority that gave Him for our good and His glory.

## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

### Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - What fear or uncertainty seems to have you “paralyzed” at this point in your life?
  - What would you say to Jesus if He asked you, “Do you want to get well?”
  
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
  
- > The challenge to memorize John 5:19.
  
- > The text for next week’s study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 6:1-24.

## JOHN 5:1-47

5:1–47. The “festival cycle” in John’s Gospel spans from 5:1 to 10:42 and is characterized by escalating conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. This cycle begins with yet another sign—Jesus’s healing of a lame man at a feast in Jerusalem. The fact that the healing took place on a Sabbath provoked a major controversy. Jesus was accused of breaking the law by telling the man to pick up his mat (5:8–10). The controversy escalated to the point where the Jewish leaders charged Jesus with blasphemy for claiming to continue the work of God (v. 18). This provided an occasion for Jesus to defend his ministry and enumerate evidences for his identity.

**Notes:**

5:1. After this marks the passing of an indefinite period of time. Up to a year and a half may have passed after the last recorded festival, the Passover, when Jesus cleared the temple and met with Nicodemus. The unnamed Jewish festival may have been the Festival of Shelters.

5:2. Bethesda may mean “house of mercy,” a fitting term given the desperate state of the people who lay there hoping for a miraculous cure.

5:5. We do not know the invalid’s age or how long he had been lying there, but he had been crippled for thirty-eight years, which is longer than many people in antiquity lived and roughly as long as Israel’s wilderness wanderings (Dt 2:14). For a similar healing, see Mt 9:1–8.

5:6. Realized probably indicates supernatural knowledge. Jesus’s conversation with the man may have been occasioned by his request for alms (Ac 3:1–5).

5:7. Superstition attributed the stirring of the water to the actions of an angel (see the addition of v. 4 in some later mss).

5:8–9. A mat (Gk *krabattos*; as distinguished from “bed,” Gk *klinarion*, e.g., Ac 5:15) was the poor man’s bedding. Made of straw, it could be rolled up and carried. We are not told this day was the Sabbath until the miracle was performed. This sets the context for the tensions with the unbelieving Jews (cp. 9:14).

5:10. In a petty display of religious legalism, the Jewish leaders objected to the man's picking up his mat on the Sabbath. While not actually breaking any biblical Sabbath regulations, the man was violating a rabbinical code that prohibited the carrying of an object "from one domain into another" (m. Sabb. 7:2). Hence Jesus was accused of enticing the man to sin.

**Notes:**

5:11–13. It is interesting that Jesus did not make himself known to the man when he healed him.

5:14. Jesus met the man again in the temple, a short distance from the site of his healing. Jesus's words may imply that the man's suffering was due to sin but do not suggest that all suffering is caused by personal sin. Something worse may refer to eternal judgment for sin (vv. 22–30).

5:15–16. The man never thanked Jesus. He only reported him to the authorities.

5:17. While Gn 2:2–3 teaches that God rested (Hb shabath) on the seventh day of creation, Jewish rabbis agreed that God continually upheld the universe, yet without breaking the Sabbath. If God was above Sabbath regulations, so was Jesus (Mt 12:1–14). What is more, even the Jews made exceptions to the rule prohibiting work on the Sabbath, most notably in cases where circumcision occurred on a Sabbath (Jn 7:23).

5:18. Making himself equal to God seemed to violate the OT teaching that there is only one God (Dt 6:4). Thus the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy, which became the primary charge leveled against Jesus before Pilate (Jn 19:7).

5:19. Jesus's claim that the Son is not able to do anything on his own echoes Moses's affirmation "that ... the Lord sent me to do all these things and that it was not of my own will" (Nm 16:28).

5:21. Jesus's statement that the Son also gives life to whom he wants is significant since raising the dead and giving life are the prerogatives of God alone (Dt 32:39; 1Sm 2:6; 2Kg 5:7).

5:22. Like life (v. 21), judgment is the exclusive prerogative of God (Gn 18:25; Jdg 11:27), and the Father has given all judgment to the Son.

5:23. Jesus characterized himself as God’s authorized messenger. This is similar to Moses and the prophets, who served as God’s agents and spokesmen. Of designated messengers (Hb shaliach), Jews held that “a man’s agent is like the man himself” (m. Ber. 5:5). The statement so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father in effect established Jesus’s right to be worshiped and amounted to a claim of deity.

**Notes:**

5:25. Jesus’s words are reminiscent of Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezk 37).

5:26. The claim that Jesus had life in himself echoes the affirmation in the prologue of John’s Gospel that “in him [Jesus] was life” (1:4). It is further supported by Jesus’s statement, “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). Because he is “the life” and has life in himself, Jesus is able to give life (abundant life now; eternal life in the future) to all who place their trust in him (3:16; 10:10).

5:27. Because he is the Son of Man echoes Dn 7:13.

5:28–29. Compare these verses with Dn 12:2.

5:31–47. Jesus spoke of several witnesses who bore testimony about him: John the Baptist (vv. 32–36; cp. 1:7–8, 15, 19, 32–34; 3:26); his own works (5:36; cp. 10:25, 32, 37–38; 15:24); God the Father (5:37–38; 8:18); and the Scriptures (5:39), particularly those written by Moses (vv. 45–47). Elsewhere in this Gospel, reference is made to the witness of Jesus himself (3:11, 32; 8:14, 18; 18:37), the Spirit (chaps. 14–16, esp. 15:26), the disciples (15:27), and the Fourth Evangelist (19:35; 21:24). The “witness” theme in John’s Gospel is part of a larger “trial motif.” This reverses the world’s perspective of Jesus being put on trial. It becomes clear that it is really the world, not Jesus, that is on trial, with a multitude of witnesses bearing testimony to his true identity as Messiah. This section also emphasizes the world’s guilt for rejecting Jesus.

5:31. Jesus did not deny his reliability. He was alluding to the importance of having multiple witnesses (Dt 17:6; 19:15; cp. Nm 35:30).



5:32. Jesus was speaking of God the Father (v. 37) when he said, There is another who testifies about me. Avoiding God's name was a common way of showing reverence.

**Notes:**

5:35. Jesus's characterization of John the Baptist as a burning and shining lamp seems to echo Ps 132:17 where God "prepared a lamp" for his Anointed One. John was a "lamp" but not the Light (Jn 1:7-9); his witness was comparatively small and temporary. The past tense may imply that John was now dead or imprisoned.

5:37. The Father ... has himself testified may refer to the voice at Jesus's baptism (Mt 3:17), a passage not explicitly mentioned in John, though the primary reference may be to God's witness in Scripture (Jn 5:45-47; cp. Lk 24:27, 44; Ac 13:27; 1Jn 5:9). Jesus's affirmation that his hearers had not heard God's voice or seen his form (cp. 1:18) seems to allude to wilderness Israel, which received the law at Mount Sinai without hearing God's voice or seeing his form.

5:38. Have his word residing in you recalls the depiction of a God-fearing person who has the word of God living in his heart (Jos 1:8-9; Ps 119:11).

5:39. Scripture itself does not impart life, but it witnesses to the one who does—Jesus (cp. vv. 46-47).

5:43. Jesus predicted the proliferation of false christs as a sign of the end times (Mt 24:5). The first-century Jewish historian Josephus reported a string of messianic pretenders in the years before AD 70.

5:45-47. Jesus's appeal to Moses prepares the way for chap. 6, where Jesus is presented as the new Moses providing the new "bread from heaven." The reference to Moses as a witness or accuser against the Jews may allude to Dt 31:26-27 where the law was invoked as a witness against the Israelites. The reference to Moses writing about Jesus in Jn 5:46 may allude to the Pentateuch (attributed to Moses) or to the prediction of a "prophet like" Moses in Dt 18:15.

|             |               |                      |
|-------------|---------------|----------------------|
| LIFE GROUPS | TEACHING PLAN |                      |
|             | FW            | <i>Study of John</i> |
|             | MAY 23        | 21                   |

# PROVISION FOR OUR NEEDS

JOHN 6:1-24

MAY 23, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 6:1-24. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

**TAKEAWAY: JESUS MEETS OUR PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS.**

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**WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE ARE OFTEN HESITANT TO BRING OUR NEED BEFORE JESUS, BUT HE IS READY TO RECEIVE US AND GIVE US WHAT WE NEED.**

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**GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE PROVISION FOR OUR NEED.**

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## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

**Notes:**

- 1 What do you think of when you hear the word “needs”?
  
- 2 Which things would you count as basic needs? Are spiritual needs basic?
  
- 3 Are spiritual needs more important than physical needs? Why or why not?

The word *need* is a common one, and rightfully so. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the word is always used correctly. For some, needs refer to what is most essential to human survival—food, clothing, and perhaps shelter. For others, the category of needs stretches further into having access to formal education, living in suburban housing, and acquiring the latest technology. Some might describe needs in terms of relationships, romance, and spirituality. So the term *need* might vary in precise meaning from person to person.

For Christians, our belief in the God who made both the material and immaterial creation—physical and spiritual reality—shapes how we define needs. God does not tell us to actively neglect or harm the physical body for the benefit of our soul (or others’ souls). We will see in John 6 that the spiritual and the physical are to coexist with one another. As Jesus demonstrated, the two are more related than we sometimes think.

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## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:1-15.

### Notes:

Though Jesus was trying to remove Himself from the crowds for some rest, the crowds beat Him to the place of isolation. Rather than sending them away, Jesus chose this as an opportunity to bolster the faith of His disciples, particularly Philip, and He can do the same for us today.

- When do you remember being like the people in this crowd—away from home and caught with inadequate provisions? What did you do to remedy the situation?
- What was this crowd's motivation for following Jesus (v. 2)? Do you think they were looking for spiritual guidance or just personal benefit? Which was your motivation when you first came to Christ?
- Why did Jesus ask Philip how they could feed all of the people if He already knew how He would feed them? What might you have said if you were Philip in this situation?

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is quite frequently used as a story to talk about world hunger and the Christian response to it. That is an appropriate use of the story, since the story shows Christ's concern for the hungry and reveals how God can take what little we offer and multiply it. However, this story is more than a story about hunger; it is a story for any person who feels that their resources are inadequate to meet the challenges they face. And who has not faced such a situation? Sometimes it feels like we are looking through opposite ends of binoculars at the challenges ahead of

us and the resources within us. We look at our challenges and they seem magnified, much larger than they often turn out to be. We look at our resources with those binoculars turned around, and they seem oh so tiny!

**Notes:**

Jesus gave the disciples the specific task of finding food for the crowd. He not only taught them to trust Him to provide in ministry, but also to trust Him to provide for their own physical needs in the meantime.

- How much provision did the boy provide and how much was left over? What point was Jesus trying to make by performing this miracle?
- What caused Jesus to withdraw to a mountain by Himself? What was He worried might happen, and why did that worry Him?
- When do you remember God providing for you when you were worried that you wouldn't have enough for your needs?
- What big challenge are you facing in your life right now where it seems like your resources are an insignificant "five loaves and two small fish"?

Jesus showed us that even if all we have is five loaves and two fish, it is enough when it is dedicated to God. God will multiply whatever we offer to Him, and He will make it more than adequate to meet our challenges. But we must do two things: We must offer what we have (What would have happened had the boy withheld his five loaves and two fish?), and we must have faith in what God can do with what we offer Him.

Ultimately, the real problem in this account was not the hunger of the crowd; it was the small faith of the disciples. As we grow with Jesus, we grow to see Him as greater than we ever imagined. We must continue in that process of being amazed by God, or we will always be trying to worship the God of our own imagination.

**Notes:**

Verses 14-15 show that we can respond to Jesus in the wrong way, even in declaring the truth about Him (i.e., “the Prophet”). We can misidentify Jesus as primarily a political Savior when in truth He came to save us from something more threatening than Roman oppression, namely the penalty of sin. If we misunderstand the nature of Jesus’ ministry as recorded in His first coming, we misunderstand who He is as the Bread of life come into the world.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:16-24.

- Which part of this story do you identify with most strongly at this point in your life (separated from Jesus and feeling like you’re on your own; afraid while facing rough waters; the reassurance from Christ to not be afraid)?
- Why do you think the disciples left Jesus behind and went out in the boat? When was the last time you faced a difficult trial?
- Why were the disciples scared (v. 19)?

Jesus often spent time alone to be spiritually renewed. He did this in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry and at various other times during His ministry. (See Matt. 4:1-11; 26:36-46; Mark 1:35-37.) Just before this story, John told us Jesus “withdrew again to a mountain by himself” (6:15). While Jesus was retreating, the disciples left without Him and headed toward Capernaum. Why did they

leave without Jesus? Perhaps they didn't know where He had gone. Perhaps He had told them to go and make some preparations. (Matt. 14:22 indicates that this may have been the case.) We really can't tell from John's description. What we do know is that it set the scene for one of Jesus' greatest signs of who He was—walking on water. This was no ordinary rabbi!

**Notes:**

- Why do you think it took the crowd so long to discover that Jesus had left? If you had been part of the crowd, what “detective work” would you have done to find out where Jesus had gone?

Jesus was no ordinary rabbi or just another magic man. The crowd had not yet grasped this. They looked to Jesus as someone who was able to provide for their needs in some magical way. But the crowd did not understand that this Man was a special manifestation of God Himself. Next week, we will see that Jesus sought to redirect their thinking from looking for magical provision for physical needs to provision for the spiritual need that is at the heart of life.



## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

### Notes:

- What is your biggest concern about the coming week? How can you seek spiritual provision for this situation in Jesus?
- What is the nature of the “stormy waters” you have found yourself in most recently? How would you like Jesus to help you “rise above” these stormy waters?
- How can you point those around you to Jesus as the true Bread of life over the temporary pursuits of the world?

## PRAY

Thank God that He provides not only physical provision, but also spiritual provision that lasts forever. Pray that God would use you to point others to Jesus, the Bread of life.

## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

**Notes:**

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - What are some practical ways you can remind yourself of the power and presence of God in your life?
  - What does it look like in your life this week to bring your deficiencies and inadequacies to God?
  
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
  
- > The challenge to memorize John 6:20.
  
- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 6:25-70.

## JOHN 6:1-24

6:1–4. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus had crossed to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee at a time when the Jewish Passover feast was near. If we accept John 5:1 as a Passover, the reference in 6:4 would be the third Passover observance recorded in this Gospel.

**Notes:**

This is one of those several examples in John where we see the miracle-message method of Jesus' ministry. Paul told the Corinthians that Jews required a sign, and John reminded us that a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick (6:2). Some scholars estimate there may have been as many as seven thousand to ten thousand people, since verse 10 talks about five thousand men. As we shall see, this chapter is about faith, but these people wanted food. Jesus talked about spiritual relationship, but the crowds were interested in physical showmanship. They focused on the lunch, not the love; on their bellies, not their beliefs.

Our passage first centers on people in need. As we have already seen, starvation is a stark and unpleasant reality in our modern world. Ten percent of the world's babies die before their first birthday, and one of every four children suffers from malnutrition. Yet the problem of spiritual hunger is even more severe. Like the people gathering on the mountainside in Galilee, millions today need the living bread that only Jesus can provide.

The introduction of the Passover is always significant in the chronological pattern of John's Gospel. He contrasted the rejection in Jerusalem at the end of chapter 5 with the magnificent scene of thousands coming to hear Jesus speak on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. This body of water actually has four names in Scripture: The Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberias both identified here in our text; the Lake of Gennesaret in Luke 5:1; and the Sea of Kinnereth (Num. 34:11). Today it is generally called Lake

Kinneret, but students of the Bible have difficulty calling it anything other than the Sea of Galilee.

The bread-and-water connection has ancient Israeli roots in the manna of the desert and water from the rock. The entire Exodus experience sets the historic basis for the Jewish Passover Feast. Borchert suggests a useful reminder: “Those familiar with the Psalms will also recognize that the two mercies of water control and food supply were very significant to the psalmist (cf. Ps 78:13–30). In Israel’s history, stories of food and water are indelibly attached to faith. From the tree of life in the garden, the rescue of Noah in the flood, and throughout their pilgrimage these two symbols are repeatedly reweven into the fabric of God’s dealings with His people. It is understandable then that Paul, thinking like a Jew, also linked these two symbols in his warnings to the Corinthians about their relationship with God (10:1–4)” (Borchert, p. 249).

## Notes:

6:5–9. Remember that Jesus had been doing more miracles than the three John has recorded for us so far. Many people followed him because of their interest in his power and his teaching. This crowd would have been greatly enlarged because of the number of visitors to Palestine for the Passover. Jesus had led his disciples out to this solitary place to have some private teaching time with them, but the crowds followed. Mark tells us in his account that Jesus had compassion on them and taught them late into the day—and he also saw their need for food.

From a picture of people in need we move to a picture of the disciples in confusion. Philip’s reply is so typical of what we might say. He looked strictly at the human dilemma, considering only his own resources, and pronounced that the situation was hopeless. This whole inquiry was instigated by Jesus’ question: Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? It is typical of John to remind his readers that Jesus already knew what would happen next (v. 6). At first we wonder why Philip was singled out, but then we remember he was a native of Bethsaida, possibly the closest town. If a local convenience store had been open at that hour, Philip would have known about

it. Nevertheless, Philip did a quick assessment of what it would cost for each one to have a bite!

Westcott starts with the assumption that a denarius was a day's wage and "concludes that 200 denarii would buy 4,800 quarts of barley, or 1,600 quarts of wheat" (cited in Morris, p. 343). Modern currency translations grope for some way to express the enormity of Philip's problem. The Living Bible has Philip say, "It would take a fortune to begin to do it!" To Philip—the task was impossible.

## Notes:

But Andrew had a plan; this fellow-citizen of Bethsaida found a boy carrying a lunch consisting of barley loaves and fish. Like Philip, Andrew had no idea what use that pittance would be. John's record offers so many interesting observations, not the least of which is that the two fish Andrew found were definitely small. The word *opsarion* is used only by John, and it emphasizes the insignificance of these tiny sardines.

Two things surface in this portion of our text. First, we see that Jesus Christ was all-sufficient for any need even when his disciples were in confusion. Second, the purpose of the miracle seems clear: to instruct the disciples, to lay a foundation for the sermon on the bread of life, and to feed hungry people.

6:10–13. Like Moses' ancient rod, Samson's donkey jawbone, and David's sling, this simple lunch shows again that seemingly useless things can become important in Jesus' hands. He alone is all-sufficient. Everyone was satisfied, and each disciple had his own personal basket of leftovers as a reminder of the Master's power. The identification of the number of men appears in all four Gospels. We can only guess what the total number of people might have been. Some estimates reach as high as twenty thousand people. What a wonderful picture John paints of Jesus holding those five small barley loaves in his hands as he gave thanks. The verb is the word from which we get our word *eucharist*, though this was a simple mealtime blessing, not a religious ceremony.

But why the command to gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted? Obviously the ample provision is important (Jer. 31:14), and surely a special focus on the role of the disciples. All of them probably doubted that anything could be done to feed this vast number of people. Philip and Andrew just happened to be on the spot to respond publicly.

**Notes:**

Yes, Jesus can supply all our needs. And he often works miracles to provide for us physically. But there is always the need for faith and the intent to teach us to trust him for both physical and spiritual needs. As God provides for our physical needs, we should let down our defenses and allow him to put his arms around us and tame our sinful and rebellious spirits.

6:14–15. No one could deny the miracle, especially those who had enjoyed lunch. Many people were drawn back again to questions posed to John the Baptist in 1:21, particularly the reference to “that prophet” promised by Moses. But Jesus would have none of their political pressure brought on by full stomachs. He slipped again into the hills for rest and worship. Mark told us that he “dismissed the crowd” (Mark 6:45), and John told us that he withdrew again to a mountain by himself. He would be no political messiah hustled into battle with the Romans to regain Palestine for Israel.

This passage marks one of the high points of Jesus’ popular favor. Since the promise of Deuteronomy 18, the Jews had looked for another Moses, for the great Prophet sent from God. And who better to fulfill that prophecy than this Jesus who gave them a new kind of manna? But the crowd’s limited view of the prophet’s message and ministry seemed to exclude his spiritual mission. They had no understanding of suffering for sinners and death for forgiveness.

No. Jesus could not accept the popular movement to make him king. The people were ready to offer him worship, but it was false worship. This was one of the things

Satan had promised during the temptation in the wilderness—Jesus’ own people wanting to make him king.

**Notes:**

On their way back to Georgia from south Texas, my son and his family stopped in New Orleans. That city has one of the country’s oldest trolleys which carries visitors to the zoo. It looked like a great idea so the whole family—Mom, Dad, and two children—jumped on. Jeff assumed the role of sufficient and dependable leader. He watched his map, looked for landmarks, and told the family when to jump off the trolley. But as they rose to get off, the driver looked right at him and shook his head. “You’re going to the zoo, right?” Jeff nodded and offered a feeble “Yes.” “Next stop,” said the driver. Sometimes we lean on our own maps and fail to consult the source of true authority about what we should do with our lives.

6:16–18. The Sea of Galilee lies six hundred feet below sea level, and the prevailing winds still blow from the west. According to John, his disciples went down to the lake. But both Matthew and Mark specify that Jesus sent his disciples away. We see here a lesson in authority for the disciples. Several of them were fishermen, and this east-west route across the lake toward the town of Capernaum would not have been unfamiliar. But it was dark and the waters were treacherous. This miracle also appears in Matthew 14:22–33 and Mark 6:45–52. Presumably, Jesus had set a time and perhaps even a place where he would meet them on the west coast of the lake.

6:19–21. The distance across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee is about five miles, so they were more than half way across when they saw Jesus walking on the water. He knew their problems with faith and fear; Mark tells us he had been watching them (Mark 6:48). This was no ghost, no mystical apparition brought about by their terrified emotions. His words are so like the Lord: It is I; don’t be afraid.

This miracle revealed Jesus’ authority to the disciples and his purpose of ministry to the crowds. The requirements for help in their distress were simple enough—recognize

their own need and take Jesus into the boat. That has not changed much in our day. But just seeing Jesus and recognizing him were not enough; they had to take him into the boat. As we shall see in our continuing study of this chapter, intellectual assent must be accompanied by spiritual appropriation and personal commitment to gain eternal life, or—as in this case—to gain physical safety.

**Notes:**

Let us not move too quickly over the word immediately in verse 21. With little fuss and no intent to make a point, John probably indicated another miracle which few count in numbering the miracles in John. Some interpreters opt for the natural explanation (they were already near shore). Or perhaps the remainder of the voyage seemed as nothing compared to what they had already been through.

6:22–24. The final paragraph of this portion of chapter 6 offers us a lesson in purpose for the crowd. Obviously they were confused, never having thought the Lord crossed the lake by walking on the water. They assumed the disciples had gone west across the water and that Jesus was still on the northeastern shore. Unable to find him there, they eventually made their way to Capernaum. What did they want? More food? Another deliberate attempt to force him into political office? Whatever it was, they were hardly prepared for what they heard.



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|-------------|---------------|----------------------|
| LIFE GROUPS | TEACHING PLAN |                      |
|             | FW            | <i>Study of John</i> |
|             | MAY 30        | 21                   |

# THE BREAD OF LIFE

JOHN 6:25-70

MAY 30, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

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## PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying John 6:25-70. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

## HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: ONLY JESUS TRULY FULFILLS OUR DESIRE FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: PEOPLE NATURALLY SEEK FULFILLMENT AND MEANING OUTSIDE OF JESUS.

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GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS GAVE HIS LIFE SO THAT WE COULD HAVE FULL SATISFACTION IN GOD.

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## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

### Notes:

- 1 What are some things the world believes can give satisfaction?
- 2 How have you experienced the reality of being failed by worldly things?

Like us, the people mentioned in John 6 were distracted by things that, at best, satisfy for a short time. In fact, they were generally quite poor, and every day was spent struggling for survival. It is no small wonder that they were drawn to Jesus after He miraculously fed them and provided leftovers. In their eyes, being with Jesus would eliminate their need to work for survival. Yet Jesus was not primarily concerned about their poverty. He was concerned about something much deeper.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:25-29.

- What specifically stands out to you about how the crowd sought Jesus?
- Were these people true followers of Jesus? In what ways do we see Jesus working to change their hearts?

- What does it mean that God the Father “placed his seal of approval” on Jesus (v. 27)?

**Notes:**

In Jesus’ day, a seal was made of clay, wax, or some other soft, moderately durable substance. A seal on something showed that it was authentic, similar to the way a notary seal or stamp on a document does today. Jesus was saying that the reason the people should pursue Him for spiritual food was that the Father had authenticated Him for that purpose.

- What are the various possible answers to the people’s question in verse 28? What works does God require? What passages of Scripture could you reference to support your answer?

In verse 28, we see that people misunderstood Jesus’ statement. When Jesus told them to work for eternal food, the people asked about what work God required of them. The answer is belief in Jesus as God’s Son. In the Greek language, the word “believe” means “to rely on” or “to trust.” The noun form of the word is translated “faith.” Believing involves much more than merely accepting some facts about Jesus. The word “believe” sets a follower apart as a person who places his or her complete trust in Christ. “Believe” also carries the idea of relying on Him to keep His promises and to use His power to accomplish His purpose.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:30-35.

As if Jesus’ healing the sick and feeding the thousands weren’t miraculous enough, the crowd demanded more signs like the manna in Exodus 16. In Exodus 16, the people grumbled and complained against God about their hunger, forgetting God’s power in the exodus from Egypt. In the same way that the Jews of Moses’ day disregarded God’s signs, the Galileans disregarded Jesus’.

- How does reflecting on God's power and provision in our past help us with faith for the future? How have you experienced this in your own life?

**Notes:**

- In verses 31-32, the people revealed their doubt that Jesus was any better than Moses, and Jesus sought to correct them. In what ways is Jesus better than Moses?

Moses stood between God and the Israelites and mediated an old covenant that could not save. Jesus is better than Moses: He stands in the gap between the people and the Lord once and for all, establishing the new covenant that alone saves. (See Heb. 3). The biblical way to study the great people of God in the Old Testament is not merely to draw broad moralizations from their lives but to see how they point us to Jesus and our need for Him.

- Do you think most people would try to fulfill their spiritual hunger if all their physical needs were continually met? Why or why not?

The crowd in verse 34 clearly struggled to understand what Jesus was really talking about. Their treasure was their desire to no longer live in poverty, and Jesus was the means to that end. It's unlikely that people will seek to fill their spiritual hunger when their idols are being fed. "Junk food" may never satisfy, but it certainly keeps us occupied.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:36-59.

- To what or whom did Jesus say the temporal bread from heaven pointed (vv. 32-33,35)? How did He contrast the temporal bread with the "bread of life"?

- What assurances of eternal life did Jesus give in verses 37-40?

**Notes:**

- How does Jesus' teaching in this passage encourage us to trust God for our salvation from start to finish—for the origins of our saving faith in Jesus and its ability to endure to the end?

Jesus addressed the crowd's unbelief by telling them forthrightly that they did not believe in Him despite seeing Him firsthand (v. 36). Unless the Father has given people to the Son and drawn them to Him, they will not come to Jesus and believe in Him. We need more than miracles of manna; we need the miracle of saving faith, which is a gift from God in itself. (See Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29.)

- What does eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood mean? What is the result of eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood?

The first part of this passage seems so strange. It is hard to fathom someone wanting to be eaten by others, let alone promote it as the path to life. But Jesus is speaking metaphorically to a group that should have understood Him, as He had just recently miraculously fed them from a few fish and a few loaves of bread. This group was pursuing Jesus so that He could continue to supply bread for them, but what they needed was Jesus Himself. Eating Jesus' flesh means that we are to fully trust in Him and let Him be the source of sustenance and the source of life in us. This would be a terribly difficult saying for the Jews because they could not see Jesus for who He really was, only for who they wanted Him to be.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 6:60-71.

- What was the result of Jesus' teaching? Why did people leave? What does that tell you about how they defined their relationship with Him?
- Why did Jesus' true disciples stay? Would it have been easy for them to stay? Why or why not?
- How had faith in Christ changed them? How has it changed you?

**Notes:**

Many of Jesus' followers had a difficult time with the words of Jesus on that particular day. But Jesus clarified what He meant: It meant trusting Him, not His provision. It meant desiring Him, not His miracles.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

### Notes:

- The people in today's passage worshiped comfortable lives and tried to follow Jesus, thinking He would fulfill those desires. Are there idols in your life that you may be trying to obtain through Jesus? What steps can you take this week toward removing those idols from your life?
- In what practical ways can we encourage one another to live lives that demonstrate we've made this faith our own?
- What current ministry opportunities are available to you through our church that might give you the chance to share with others that Jesus alone truly satisfies?

## PRAY

Close your group time in prayer. Thank God for being all that we need. Pray for the power to believe and experience that Jesus truly satisfies more than anything else in this world.



## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

**Notes:**

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - What do you long for in your everyday life that may be keeping you from experiencing a deeper love for Jesus and a greater longing for Him?
  
  - What incites a deeper desire and craving for Jesus in your heart and soul? How can you enjoy the good things in your life while giving thanks to Jesus for giving them to you?
  
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
  
- > The challenge to memorize John 6:29.
  
- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: John 7:1-52.

## JOHN 6:25-71

6:26. Jesus charged them with caring only about having full stomachs rather than about the significance of the signs.

**Notes:**

6:27–29. People misunderstood Jesus’s statement and asked about the works God required. Jesus said the only “work” required by God is faith in Messiah.

6:30. Again, the people misunderstood. They demanded a sign as evidence of Jesus’s claims (cp. 1Co 1:22). Jesus pointed to the significance of the “sign” he had just performed—the feeding of the crowd (cp. 2:18). This revealed people’s stubbornness, which led many of Jesus’s disciples to leave (6:60–66) and prompted John to indict the Jews for unbelief at the close of Jesus’s public ministry (12:37–40).

6:31. This verse links exodus and Passover motifs with Jesus as the prophet like Moses and the expectation that God would again provide manna in the messianic age. The OT reference seems to involve several passages, with Ps 78:23–24 being most prominent (Ex 16:4, 15; Neh 9:15; Ps 105:40).

6:32–34. The manna in the wilderness was pointing to the true bread from heaven, which is Jesus.

6:35,48. I am the bread of life is the first of Jesus’s seven “I am” sayings in John. Subsequently he said he is “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5); “the gate” of the sheep (10:7, 9); the “good shepherd” (10:11, 14); “the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6); and “the true vine” (15:1). Apart from these sayings, there are statements where Jesus referred to himself as “I am” (6:20 textual note; 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5), a clear allusion to God’s identification as “I AM” (Ex 3:14).

6:36. The earthly thinking of Jesus’s audience resulted from their unbelief.

6:37,44. Jesus affirmed the twin themes of election and perseverance of the saints, prominent topics in John's Gospel. Those predestined by God will come to Jesus, and Jesus will preserve his own. No one can come to Jesus apart from the Father's drawing him. These themes continue in the good shepherd discourse (10:28–29) and Jesus's final prayer (17:6, 9, 11–12).

**Notes:**

6:38–39. The believer's security is founded on the Son's faithfulness in doing the Father's will.

6:41,43. The references to the complaining of the Jews highlights the parallel between Jews of Jesus's day and wilderness Israel (cp. Ex 16:2, 8–9; Nm 11:4–23). The Israelites complained about the first giver of bread, Moses. Now they griped against the second giver, Jesus.

6:42. People showed no awareness of Jesus's virginal conception (Mt 1:18–25). They objected to Jesus's claim of descent from heaven since he was clearly human and was, they believed, conceived in the standard way (4:44).

6:45. Citing Is 54:13, Jesus affirmed that, while his ministry fulfilled the prophetic vision that one day all people would be taught by God, this applied only to those who were drawn by the Father and who came to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

6:46. Learning from the Father and seeing him are different. Only Jesus has seen the Father—not even Moses has seen him, which makes Jesus's revelation greater than Moses's.

6:47–52. Jesus contrasted the manna in the wilderness and the bread from heaven. Only the latter can provide eternal life. Jesus's flesh refers to his body on the cross, given for sin. Such talk raised questions from his audience.

6:53–59. Jesus meant for his words to be taken neither in a literal nor in a sacramental sense. The Hebrew idiom “flesh and blood” refers to the total person. Nowhere is Jesus's teaching more shocking than here. Eternal life

comes from eating his flesh and drinking his blood—that is, from believing in him.

6:60–63. Even Jesus’s disciples were offended by such talk. But Jesus explained that he was talking spiritually. Unaided by the Spirit, human reason cannot discern spiritual truth. The Jews wrongly believed study of Scripture (see note at 5:39) and doing “works of God” (see note at 6:27–29) were sufficient for spiritual understanding.

**Notes:**

6:64–66. Many of Jesus’s disciples turned from him at this point, which is a watershed in John’s Gospel. But Jesus was not surprised by the defection.

6:67–68. To whom will we go? may refer to transferring allegiance to another rabbi (cp. 1:35–37).

6:69. Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Holy One of God anticipates later references to Jesus being set apart for God (10:36; 17:19). In the OT, God was called the “Holy One of Israel” (Ps 71:22; Is 43:3; 54:5). See similar confessions of Jesus in Mt 16:16; Mk 8:29; Lk 9:20.

6:70. This is the first reference to the Twelve in John’s Gospel. Their existence and appointment are assumed from the testimony in the Synoptic Gospels. See notes at 1:43; 15:16.

6:71. Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son, likely was the only non-Galilean among the Twelve.