



**A LENTEN BIBLE READING PLAN FOR THE
GOSPEL OF JOHN**

February 10 - March 27, 2016

Mountain Brook Baptist Church

www.mbbc.org



GOSPEL OF JOHN

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the gospel of John during the season of Lent. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

This season of the year is one for looking inwardly in order to identify places in our lives where grace is most required. The Gospel of John identifies Jesus as the primary source of divine grace. As John states in his prologue, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The unmerited favor we require for forgiveness and restoration from sin comes ultimately and definitively in the person of Jesus.

As you read through this Gospel, be prepared to pay close attention to repetitions of key words and phrases. These repetitions are not by accident; they signal instead essential truths that help us to experience the "life more abundant" (John 10:10; 20:31) God has made possible to those who believe in Jesus.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK ONE: JOHN 1:1-2:25
FEBRUARY 10-14, 2016
DR. DOUG DORTCH

Wednesday, February 10 | John 1:1-28

As every literary work begins with some form of introduction, so John's Gospel opens with an explanation of the significance of Jesus. However, unlike the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which begin with birth narratives, John's Gospel goes back to the beginning in order to emphasize the pre-existent nature of Jesus. Using "Genesis language," John takes great pains to prove that as the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus was one with God from eternity.

What's most important about the prologue is John's introduction of "Logos," or "Word" in reference to Jesus. Written as it was toward the end of the first century, John's Gospel draws upon Greek philosophical notions as a way of underscoring the manner in which faith in Jesus becomes the unifying principle for everyday existence. If one wishes to experience true life here and now, then it's imperative that he orders his everyday affairs around Jesus, "the light of men" (John 1:4).

Thursday, February 11 | John 1:29-51

The first significant theological concept is introduced immediately following the Prologue – the importance of bearing witness to Jesus. The word witness in the Greek is the word from which we transliterate our English word "martyr." Therefore, bearing witness to Jesus was a costly act in the first century world, even as it is today, but it is necessary for others to be able to perceive the true identity of Jesus as one sent from God to connect us with everlasting life.

The first witness is John the Baptist. John's popularity wanes in the presence of Jesus, and to his credit he does not show any hesitation in deferring to Jesus' superiority. Instead, John is careful to point to Jesus as the "Chosen One" (1:34) whom God had sent to fulfill His redemptive purposes.

Jesus' first disciples are in fact former disciples of John! One of them, Andrew, immediately goes and gets his brother Simon (Peter) to join him in following after Jesus. There is no clearer example of the power of a faithful witness than one who urges others to join in the Jesus journey. Likewise, Philip, another of Jesus' first disciples, invites his friend Nathanael, to become a follower of Jesus, even though Nathanael is not certain that anyone from such a backwoods place as Nazareth would be worth following across town. It's only when Jesus tells Nathanael things about him that no one could have known (another key concept in John) does Nathanael "believe" and follow.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK ONE: JOHN 1:1-2:25

FEBRUARY 10-14, 2016

DR. DOUG DORTCH

Friday, February 12 | John 2:1-25

Jesus' first miracle takes place at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, a town not far from Nazareth, where Jesus had spent his early years. The fact that it happens on "the third day" positions it as the first pointer to the means by which "everlasting life" will be introduced into this mortal existence through the miracle of resurrection.

The miracle itself represents the manner in which the grace Jesus brings into situations "saves the day" and is a source of inexhaustible joy. The steward's recognition of how "the best has been saved to last" also points to the superiority of Jesus' ministry over that which has come before him.

However, not everyone will embrace Jesus' superiority. As the scene shifts to Jerusalem and the clearing of the temple (as opposed to the Synoptic Gospels, which have this scene toward the end of Jesus' ministry), Jesus' primary opponents, the religious leadership of the Jewish people, are introduced, and the stage is set for a series of confrontations that will only come to an end at Calvary and the Garden Tomb.

Saturday, February 13 - Sunday, February 14 | John 1:1-2:25

Read John 1:1-2:25 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.

Application

As you continue on in reading this Gospel, know that Jesus is the sole source of our salvation. Understand that God has drawn near to us through His One and Only Son in order that we might not lack anything in fulfilling His purposes for us in creation. Be prepared to encourage others to join you on your Jesus journey, for as is so often the case, the more the merrier. After all, there is grace enough for everyone, and only the most self-obsessed soul would fail to recognize all he would miss if he missed Jesus.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK TWO: JOHN 3:1-5:47

DR. DOUG DORTCH

FEBRUARY 15-21, 2016

Monday, February 15 | John 3:1-36

Nicodemus is an important character in John's Gospel (John 7:45-52; 19:38-42), who doesn't appear in any other Gospel. The fact that he comes to Jesus "by night" suggests that while he is attracted to Jesus, he is not yet ready to be identified with him.

The conversation Nicodemus has with Jesus results in the heartbeat of our faith: eternal life comes to those who are "born again" (or "born from above"). His misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching is another indication of John's insistence on faith as the key to understanding Jesus' significance. The presence of Jesus confronts the entire world with a decision to believe or not.

In this section, John the Baptist makes his final appearance. Only this Fourth Gospel contains references to Jesus baptizing others, and when John the Baptist's disciples express concern that "all have gone after him" (3:26), John the Baptist makes his own confession that Jesus is the way to eternal life and that he has served his purpose in pointing others in Jesus' direction.

Tuesday, February 16 | John 4:1-26

The meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at a well addresses numerous barriers that were prevalent in the ancient world: ethnic barriers, gender barriers, and religious barriers to name a few. Like Nicodemus, this woman misunderstands Jesus' invitation, but when it becomes clear, she too believes and goes back to her community to bear witness to his authority.

Wednesday, February 17 | John 4:27-54

Not everyone is able to appreciate the way Jesus breaks down barriers between those who trust in him. His disciples most surely couldn't appreciate it. Their misunderstanding shows their need for a deeper understanding of what it means to believe in Jesus.

An example of someone who does believe comes in a Capernaum official, a Gentile, whose son is at the point of death. When he asks for Jesus' help, Jesus sends him on his way. The official does, only to discover that in the process of obeying the word of Jesus, healing indeed comes to his son. This healing John calls "the second sign" of Jesus' redemptive ministry (v. 54).



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK TWO: JOHN 3:1-5:47

DR. DOUG DORTCH

FEBRUARY 15-21, 2016

Thursday, February 18 | John 5:1-29

First century Judaism defined itself around Sabbath observance. Therefore, a challenge to the Sabbath was viewed as a challenge to the definition of community in Jesus' day. Moreover, carrying a mat was considered a form of work, which would be another violation of Jewish law.

None of these concerns constrained Jesus from offering a man who had been ill for 38 years. Having been "beaten to the punch" too many times, the man was on the verge of giving up. Jesus saw his need and responded to it in a way that connected his work with God's. Once again, Jesus gives witness to how God's work was being done through him.

Friday, February 19 | John 5:30-47

You will have noticed the number of times the concept of "witness" has occurred in the Fourth Gospel to this point. That wasn't a New Testament distinctive. The Old Testament emphasized witness as well, though with the caveat that any witness must be corroborated by at least one other person (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). When pressed on this matter, Jesus must support his claim with at least another witness.

Jesus ends up doing more than required; he offers three! Jesus points to what John the Baptist has said, what the Spirit of God Himself says, and what the Scriptures say regarding the Messiah. Then to counter the accusations of his opponents, he invokes Moses, the people's advocate with God (Ex. 17:1-7; 32:30-34) as their accuser in their unbelief regarding Jesus.

Saturday, February 20 - Sunday, February 21 | John 3:1-5:47

Read John 3:1-5:47 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK THREE: JOHN 6:1-8:59

WAYNE SPLAWN

FEBRUARY 22-28, 2016

Monday, February 22 | John 6:1-24

We often act as if we are self-sufficient. We face the challenges that come our way by taking stock of the resources at hand and use our intellect and abilities to solve the problems we face. However, there are seasons in life when we face seemingly insurmountable obstacles that serve to remind us that we are dependent upon God.

In John 6:1-21, the disciples are faced with a challenge they are not able to meet. Thousands of people have gathered around Jesus and Jesus asks the disciples if they have a plan to feed the crowd. The disciples survey the situation, take stock of their material resources and come to the conclusion that feeding such a large crowd is impossible. Apart from the power of Jesus at work in their lives, they are surely correct. In their own strength, they are not able to feed the masses.

Jesus takes this opportunity to display His power. He takes the limited resources of five barley loaves and two fish and multiplies them so that the people are fed and there are twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus has the ability to take our finite, limited resources and do miraculous things.

What challenges do you currently face in life? How are you tempted to face these challenges in your own strength? Do you feel helpless at the prospect of overcoming these obstacles? Ask God to help you humbly walk in dependence upon Jesus Christ in every season of life. Lay all of your resources at the feet of the Lord and ask Him to accomplish His plans and purposes through you today.

Tuesday, February 23 | John 6:25-71

Have you ever been hungry, but could not decide what you wanted to eat? You go to the pantry or look in the refrigerator and survey what you have at home, but nothing seems appetizing. You try a bite of this or snack on that, but nothing seems to satisfy you.

This is a good picture of the way that many people go through life. We all have this longing deep inside of our hearts and we are tempted to look to the things of this world to satisfy us. We look to education, career, family, sports, vacations, and other pursuits of this life, but all of those things ultimately leave us unsatisfied. What is the answer? What or who will satisfy us?

We find the answer to this all-important question here in John 6:25-71. In verse 35, Jesus says that He is the bread of life and that He will satisfy all who come to Him. Only Jesus will ultimately satisfy us because He alone is the source of eternal life. If you are worn out in your attempts to find satisfaction in the things of this world, look to Jesus Christ. As you use this season of Lent to prepare yourself to celebrate Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, ask the Lord to reveal to you the ways that you are trying to find satisfaction apart from Him.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK THREE: JOHN 6:1-8:59

WAYNE SPLAWN

FEBRUARY 22-28, 2016

Wednesday, February 24 | John 7:1-53

Who is Jesus? This question has been the cause of much speculation since the days that Jesus carried out His public ministry on earth, and this question takes center stage here in John 7. Many of the people featured in this chapter do not understand who Jesus is. Jesus' family does not believe that He is the Christ. The religious leaders are offended by Jesus' humble origins and His failure to fulfill their Messianic expectations. They conclude that Jesus is nothing more than a false teacher trying to lead the people astray. The vast majority of people mentioned in this chapter do not believe that Jesus is the Christ.

However, there are others who see Jesus from a different perspective. These folks marvel at Jesus' authoritative teaching, are amazed at His miracles, and are of the opinion that Jesus has been truly sent from God. Some even arrive at the conclusion that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

A chapter like this forces each of us to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" Do you believe that He truly is the Christ? As you continue to journey through the gospel of John in the days leading up to Easter Sunday, ask God to deepen your understanding of Jesus' identity. One of the ways that John seeks to help his reader understand Jesus' identity is the use of Jesus' "I Am" statements. In John 6 we saw that Jesus is the Bread of Life. Continue to pay close attention to the other "I Am" statements as you read through the Gospel of John.

Thursday, February 25 | John 8:1-30

Yesterday we considered the importance of understanding Jesus' identity. Here in John 8, Jesus makes another "I Am" statement that further clarifies who he is. In John 8:12, Jesus says that He is the light of the world. Many commentators point out that Jesus' words would have been particularly powerful in the context in which they were first spoken. The Feast of Booths was taking place in Jerusalem and a significant part of that celebration included light. Four golden lamp stands were lit and gave light to the temple courts and the entire city. Jesus uses this opportunity to help His audience understand that He is the one who light to the darkness in our world.

Have you ever tried to walk through your house on a night when the power was out? If so, you know how challenging that can be. In such situations, even the smallest amount of light will help you make it to your desired destination. In a similar way, you and I cannot function properly without Jesus. If we try to make it through this life without Him, we will be like people stumbling in the darkness. Ask God to illuminate your path with the light of life that is only found in Jesus Christ. Also, ask God to give you the opportunity to bear witness to Jesus. So many around you are walking in darkness and desperately need to know Jesus, the Light of the World!



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK THREE: JOHN 6:1-8:59

WAYNE SPLAWN

FEBRUARY 22-28, 2016

Friday, February 26 | John 8:31-59

The question of Jesus' identity precipitates a heated argument here in John 8:31-59. The Jews gathered around Jesus on this occasion continue to question Jesus. They even accuse Him of being demon possessed and inferior to Abraham and the prophets.

Jesus tackles these allegations head-on and teaches His opponents that He is greater than Moses because He existed before Moses. The clear implication of Jesus' statement here is that He is pre-existent and therefore, God. This claim of Jesus sends His opponents over the top and they seek to stone Him.

One of the most intriguing things about this chapter of John's gospel is Jesus' teaching that His opponents' inability to understand His identity is a sign that they do not belong to God. Their lack of faith in God's saving purposes in Jesus is a sign that they do not belong to God. Many people claim to belong to God, but the true test of our identity is whether or not we have faith in Jesus Christ.

Saturday, Saturday February 27 - Sunday, February 28 | John 6:1-8:59

Read John 6:1-8:58 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FOUR: JOHN 9:1-12:50
MARY SPLAWN
FEBRUARY 29-MARCH 2, 2016

Monday, February 29 | John 9:1-41

To me, the interesting thing about John 9 is the way Jesus decides to heal the blind man. Take another look at verse 6. Jesus spits in the dirt and makes a small mud cake, then puts it on the man's eyes.

Why do you think Jesus healed the man in this way?

Perhaps Jesus is teaching us something profound here. Remember back to when God created Adam. Genesis 2:7 says that "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground." Out of the mud comes a man!

In this miracle in John 9, Jesus also uses dust to repair a man. Do you see the analogy? By His actions, Jesus is indicating what He verbalizes in John 10, "I and my Father are one." Jesus is not only a prophet as some think, rather as John says in chapter one, He is the Creator and "through him all things were made."

Take some time to praise our God who reveals Himself in our Lord Jesus Christ. Bring to Him your needs and your faith, knowing that He has authority over all things!

Tuesday, March 1 | John 10:1-42

In our culture, we often equate faster with better. We want to make a beeline to success in all areas of our lives. That's why we have things like high speed internet, productivity charts, microwave mashed potatoes, and text messaging.

While quicker is better in many respects, when it comes to hearing the voice of God, often the slower, more methodical approach is best. If you've already read today's passage, take some time to read it again. Before you do, pray that God would speak to you about your current life situations from His Word. Slow down as you read, notice what jumps out at you, think about the attributes of God that are being revealed in this passage and stop and pray for people who are brought to your mind.

While we can't read and retain all that God has for us in His 66 books of the Bible today, we can know that little by little, as we study with listening ears and an open heart, God will lead us as a shepherd leads His flock.

And, when we follow to the voice of God that is most clearly revealed in his Word, Jesus' saying will be true of us, "[In me] they will have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FOUR: JOHN 9:1-12:50
MARY SPLAWN
FEBRUARY 29-MARCH 2, 2016

Wednesday, March 2 | John 11:1-57

Do you have a certain prayer vocabulary? Recently, I noticed that one of my favorite prayers is "even now." Even now Lord, reveal Yourself. ... even now Father, help us. ... even now, bring healing in this situation.

The phrase seemed almost rote until one day I realized the words came from the mouth of Martha! "Even now," Martha says, "God will give you whatever you ask" (John 11:22).

Martha knew the power that Jesus had. This is why she is so distraught when she sees Jesus and declares, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Like Martha, we can come to Jesus with our overwhelming needs and place our faith in the One who has power over life and death. We say, "Lord 'even now' You have power over these situations and Your plans cannot be thwarted."

And as we say "even now" to God, He also says "even now" to us. Look at Joel 2:12. "'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'" As we continually return to our gracious and compassionate God, in repentance and contrition, He will work in and through us for His glory.

Today, accept God's call to repentance and claim His great power over the life situations that only He can master. Even now Lord we believe and want to see Your glory revealed!



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FOUR: JOHN 9:1-12:50

WYATT HARRIS

MARCH 3-6, 2016

Thursday, March 3 | John 12:1-19

In first half of John 12 we have two stories that, on close consideration, share a common theme: something unexpected is happening. First, we see Mary taking a rather valuable portion of perfume and anointing Jesus with it—by pouring it on His feet and wiping it with her hair. Next, we see Jesus being hailed as King of Israel as He rides into town on a donkey. Both of these events are out of the ordinary.

In the gospel of John we are directed beyond what would normally be seen as common sense. Common sense tells us that this particular act of anointing is wasteful: “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages!” (John 12:5). We would not normally expect for kings to ride around on donkeys—“at first His disciples did not understand all this” (John 12:16).

Our human expectations tell us to do the pragmatic and economical thing. But John is telling us to pay attention. The Bridegroom is here! The pragmatic thing can and will be done later. “You will always have the poor among you” (John 12:8). But a man who raises Lazarus from the dead? A man who is riding around on a colt being hailed as ‘King’ of Israel? These things don’t happen everyday.

Our first instinct is often to explain away things we don’t understand. Jesus has stirred things up and defied expectations—and the chief priests want to thwart him. They cannot comprehend: “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” (John 12:19). Indeed - and we so often do the same. We seek control over our lives. We want our expectations met. And we so often appear to be doing the right thing! But if Judas and the disciples are any indication, our motivations are often not pure and we are in danger of missing the point of what is happening before us.

So what is happening here in John 12? John has emphatically told us up front: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14) ... ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29). And here in John 12, the tension is building; Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. We know where the story goes.

Here, I think we must pause. We should rest here in the text. John is telling us something about what God is doing through Jesus. John wants us to see the deeper truth happening in the midst of our everyday reality. And what God is doing often defies our own expectations and ideas. Jesus comes riding a donkey. He is extravagantly anointed with expensive perfume, which we believe could be used for better purposes.
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GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FOUR: JOHN 9:1-12:50

WYATT HARRIS

MARCH 3-6, 2016

Thursday, March 3 | John 12:1-19

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Though we cannot help but interpret events according to our own expectations, though we are often caught up in the normal flow of life, and though we do the best we can to control and make sense out of our experiences—God nevertheless meets us here, in the midst of our everyday lives in ways that we would not expect. This is grace. God in the flesh, dwelling among us, accomplishing His purposes. Praise be to God—Amen!

Friday, March 4 | John 12:20-50

In this stunning passage we find out exactly what Jesus has been doing. Remembering our previous passage, we can now say that in Jesus, God is dwelling among us in the flesh and accomplishing His plans for this world. And God is doing so amidst the tension and contradiction we often experience in this world. The tension is now here. The story is moving. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (12:23). How will the Son of Man be glorified? In a way that we would least expect: Jesus the “kernel of wheat” will die; the soul of the Son of Man is troubled; the light will only remain a bit longer “before darkness overtakes” the world. The One who is glorified defies belief: “Even after Jesus had performed so many signs ... they still would not believe in him” (12:37). The witnesses who secretly believed or wanted to believe feared public opinion, “for they loved human praise more than praise from God” (12:43).

Nevertheless, Jesus’ message is clear: the will of the Father is happening. Jesus is accomplishing the purposes of God. Even more: Jesus *is the will of God*; Jesus *is the purpose of the Father*. God the Father has “glorified” His name and will do so again (12:28). He will do so in that He has come “to save the world” (12:47). Jesus has come to die in order that, in his words, “when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (12:32).

God has been at work among his people from ages past—making promises to Abraham, leading His people Israel from Egypt and establishing them in the land, freeing them from exile. But God will do even greater things through Jesus. He will glorify His name again. Pay attention to his Word, to the Word—Jesus Christ! Though He will die, something glorious is promised. I think we have a hint of resurrection here. A proclamation that God is up to something radically new. Light will come out of darkness. Life will come out of death. Salvation will come for those who believe.

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GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FOUR: JOHN 9:1-12:50

WYATT HARRIS

MARCH 3-6, 2016

Friday, March 4 | John 12:20-50

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The Word who became flesh dwelling among us has promised salvation. Follow this promise of Christ. Believe in Him! For those who believe in Christ also know and believe in the One who sent him. Oh, what an awesome calling and promise!

In this season of Lent, we must slow down and pay attention to what God is doing in Jesus. We must follow God along the path He lights up before us. He bids us come and die, yet He promises new life. He will glorify his name. Amazingly, we are called to, and promised a place in, His story. Amen.

Saturday, Saturday March 5 - Sunday, March 6 | John 9:1-12:50

Read John 9:1-12:50 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FIVE: JOHN 13:1-15:27

HAYDEN WALKER

MARCH 7-13, 2016

Monday, March 7 | John 13:1-20

Our readings this week are from the "Upper Room Discourse," a great record of Jesus' final night with His disciples before the crucifixion. These actions and conversations took place in the Upper Room, where Jesus shared His final meal with His disciples. These chapters, which span from John 13-17, record Jesus giving final explanations about His impending sacrifice.

Our passage today displays Jesus' sacrificial humility as He washed his disciples' feet. This action seems simple enough on the surface, but there is something deeper taking place beyond dirty feet being made clean. The portion that strikes me most deeply is that Jesus went one by one to each disciple. He took their filthy feet in His precious hands to make them clean. His actions here point clearly towards His sacrifice upon the cross.

The sacrifice on Calvary is also one-by-one, an individual cleansing- not of dirt, but of sin. Jesus didn't use a group washbasin and invite all the disciples to come soak their feet together; likewise His work on the cross was not just a blanket salvation for all humanity. Instead, He comes to us individually to cleanse us.

As I picture Jesus pausing at each foot of each disciple, it encourages me to rest in the certainty that He also moves individually from you to me, offering cleansing from our sin and the hope of life. He truly cares for us individually; your sorrows, sins, hurts and needs are made plain to Him as He comes to you and tenderly offers you His peace.

Tuesday, March 8 | John 13:21-38

Yesterday our devotion focused on the personal nature of salvation. Jesus comes to us individually to offer forgiveness of sin. Perhaps if the Upper Room Discourse ended in John 13:20, we might mistakenly believe that our salvation is all about us. We could easily become focused only on ourselves, and our redemption could become only about "me and Jesus."

We can personalize our every detail of our relationship with Christ to the degree that we begin worshipping our own preferences instead of the risen Savior. The early church father, Augustine, coined a term that helps us categorize this dangerous self-focus: *incurvatus in se*. This phrase means "curved in on the self." In our highly individualized world, this temptation is closer than we would like to imagine.

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GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FIVE: JOHN 13:1-15:27

HAYDEN WALKER

MARCH 7-13, 2016

Tuesday, March 8 | John 13:21-38

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Jesus warns His disciples to fall into this delusion. The personal attention that Christ shows us should not turn us inward, but rather outward, giving the same type of self-sacrifice, care and love for others. In John 13:34, He gives a commandment to “love one another, just as I have loved you.” That means that we are to treat one another with a sacrificial love and devotion to others that costs us our time, money and comfort. The Gospel restores us to relationship with God, and pushes outward to serve others.

Wednesday, March 9 | John 14:1-31

In our passage today, Jesus will instruct His disciples about the Holy Spirit. As a bit of an exercise to evaluate what we know, I encourage you to take a few minutes to write down the first ten things that come to mind when you think about the Holy Spirit. How does your list look?

Perhaps you may realize as you worked on your list that you do not know as much about the Spirit as you would like. If that is the case, you are not alone. A 2014 study by LifeWay Research revealed that 51% of evangelicals believe the Holy Spirit is a force, not a Person. Jesus teaches otherwise in John 14 and other New Testament passages!

But maybe knowing about the Holy Spirit is not nearly as important as actually knowing the Spirit. Jesus tells us in John 14:26-27 that He will send the Spirit, who will teach us and bring to remembrance all that Jesus said. He also granted peace. It is the indwelling of Holy Spirit that gives the believer peace. If you are missing that peace today, ask the Spirit to make His presence known to you in a real way, as Jesus promised.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK FIVE: JOHN 13:1-15:27

HAYDEN WALKER

MARCH 7-13, 2016

Thursday, March 10 | John 15:1-17

My dad is an expert at identifying trees. Just one quick glance at the bark or a leaf, and he can tell you exactly what it is. He says that he learned this from his dad; they spent many weekends in the woods hunting together as my dad was growing up.

This type of identification is hard. Any among us, however, can identify a tree if it is bearing delicious red-orange fuzzy fruit in the summer. If there is any doubt, all it takes is a bite to confirm you have a peach tree before you! The fruit confirms with certainty the type of tree. The type of fruit our lives bear also reveal who we are. Jesus advised His disciples in this memorable passage that our lives will never bear true fruit apart from Him. That is to say, we can never produce anything that resembles Him apart from Him.

If we are truly living in Christ, finding our purpose and significance and hope in Him, then we will be bearing fruit consistent with His kingdom. This fruit serves a special purpose- it glorifies God. John 15:8 records Jesus teaching that this fruit is what demonstrates to the world that we follow Jesus. What fruit is your life bearing? Is it the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)?

Friday, March 11 | John 15:18-27

As humans, we all like to be liked. We live in a world where "likes" are given at your discretion on social media. After posting a picture or opinion, you may find yourself going back later on to see just how many "likes" you've received. We enjoy the affirmation that a high number of likes brings.

In our passage for today, Jesus warns us that following Him means that we will not always be liked. Our opinions will not always be popular and our commitments will not always be politically correct. We naturally recoil at this type of dissonance in relationship. It is difficult to be hated by the world.

However, we as believers are called to take comfort in remembering that our Master, our Savior, was also hated by the world. He was so hated that the world crucified Him. Though we may not experience such outward persecution in our context, there are believers in parts of the world today facing death because of their commitment to Christ. Take some time now to ask Jesus to help you stand steadfast in His calling. Ask also that He would be present with and encourage believers who are feeling the very tangible hatred of the world upon them today.

Saturday, March 12- Sunday, March 13 | John 13:1-15:27

Read John 13:1-15:27 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SIX: JOHN 16:1-18:40

AMY JACKSON

MARCH 14-20, 2016

Monday, March 14 | John 16:1-15

Chances are, you're familiar with the expression, "I've got good news, and I've got bad news." (And, for me, I always want to hear the bad news first, to go ahead and rip the Band-Aid off!). This feels kind of like what Jesus is doing with His disciples in John 16. He starts off by sharing bad news – and, let's be honest, it's pretty bad. Jesus warns his disciples that the world will hate them, because the world also hated Him. They will be thrown out of their synagogues and will face death (John 16:2) because their oppressors do not know the Father. And, we see this bad news come to life in the book of Acts. But part of the good news is that the early church prospers under suffering; despite persecution, the gospel goes forth. In fact, one early church father went so far as to say that, "The blood of the martyrs are the seeds of the early church."

Jesus shares more good news in verses 4-15. He explains that, despite the trials believers will face, we have an advantage because we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit! I'm sure it was difficult for the disciples to understand why it was "for their advantage" (John 16:7) that Jesus would go away. But on that first Pentecost day, when the power of the Holy Spirit was poured out and filled the believers gathered to worship, they experienced the third Person of the Trinity in all of His glory! Christ tells us some about the person and the power of the Holy Spirit in these verses. He is our helper (John 16:7) and our guide (John 16:13). He knows all (John 16:13). He is the One who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8) – not us! And, He exists to glorify the Father and the Son (John 16:14).

That's pretty good news for people who have heard some pretty bad news! As I think about this news, I wonder if I live in the same expectation of opposition that the disciples experienced? Do I expect to be considered counter-cultural (at best) by worldly standards? And, I also ask myself if I live in expectation of the Holy Spirit's work in my life? Do I live each day in anticipation that the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lives in me (Romans 8:11) and works in me to make the Father known?



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SIX: JOHN 16:1-18:40

AMY JACKSON

MARCH 14-20, 2016

Tuesday, March 15 | John 16:16-33

Do you ever think about that space of time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Some traditions call that Saturday “Holy Saturday.” Here, we get a little taste of the pain the disciples will experience during those hours between Christ’s death and His resurrection. I imagine the waiting was agonizing for the disciples – and Jesus foreshadows this in John 16. Of course, these verses were probably pretty puzzling to the disciples, who didn’t know that Christ was going to be raised from the dead. In verse 16, Jesus tells the disciples that soon they won’t see Him, but later, they’ll see Him again. Clear as mud, right? They ask Jesus what He means by “a little while” (John 16:19) and He explains, pointing forward to His death on the cross and to evil’s momentary victory. He says the disciples will weep but the world will rejoice (John 16:20).

Jesus uses a beautiful image to illustrate this “waiting” period – He says it is like the period between a woman being in labor and the moment when the child is delivered. There is temporary discomfort and even fear, yes, but the result is well worth the pain! Jesus tells the disciples that they will have sorrow. They will watch their Savior and Friend be nailed to a tree as if He were a criminal. But their sorrow is also temporary. Soon, He says, their hearts will rejoice and no one will be able to take that joy from them (John 16:22). Jesus points forward to Easter Sunday to remind us that we find permanent joy in His defeat over sin, death, and the grave.

I often think we live in the same space between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, in what theologians like to call the “already, but not yet.” Although we know that God has defeated sin, death, and the grave, we still feel their sting. We still see the effects of the Fall on our world. Our bodies break, and children die, and sin wounds – even those who are marked by Christ. But the good news is that a day is coming when Christ will return and evil will be forever and finally vanquished – and no one can take away the hope and the joy that promise brings.

As you think about the space in your life that might be “Holy Saturday,” or your “already, but not yet,” how do you see God at work in the midst of the waiting and suffering we experience on earth? What brings you everlasting comfort in the midst of these temporary burdens?



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SIX: JOHN 16:1-18:40

AMY JACKSON

MARCH 14-20, 2016

Wednesday, March 16 | John 17:1-19

John 17 gives an account of Jesus' final prayer called the "High Priestly Prayer." These are words we treasure because they give us a glimpse into the heart of Christ and His communication with the Father before going to the cross. What do we learn about Jesus in this prayer? Well, a lot!

One of the themes I see in these verses is glory. Christ says that He has glorified the Father on earth and now asks that the Father would glorify Him (John 17:4-5). But this glory isn't quite the kind of glory we might picture. We picture a king high and lifted up, the same Jesus who was paraded into the city on Palm Sunday and worshipped by the masses. But the Jesus who is glorified in these verses is the Jesus who is going on to the cross. God, in all of his glory, chooses to put on flesh and come to earth – the created lives among his creatures – and He is most glorified in His final moments as He is lifted up on a cross.

We also see Christ's love and concern for His people in this prayer. He could have been praying for any number of things, but instead, in John 17, Christ spends His final moments praying for us! How crazy and humbling and loving is that? He prays that we will be in the world but not of the world (John 17:16), and that we would be sent to share the good news of the gospel just as He was sent.

That we would be in the world but not of the world – it's a pretty convicting thought. Sometimes as believers, it seems easier to us just to blend in, to go along to get along, with the ways of the world. Or, the other extreme is to separate ourselves and remove ourselves completely from the world – segregating ourselves so that we aren't tempted or contaminated by what's "out there." But Jesus advocates neither position here. In fact, He tells us that he is sending us into the world because He was sent into the world – we are His witnesses to a world dying and lost without Him.

Though we are no longer "of the world" but have been born again, we are "in the world" and have the privilege of being salt and light, pointing others to Christ. We can't do this if we're just "going along to get along" and try to blend in. We also can't be light and salt if we've separated ourselves from the world and live in a holy huddle. Christ calls us to engagement with the lost, and in His final moments, He is praying that we would make His glory known.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SIX: JOHN 16:1-18:40

AMY JACKSON

MARCH 14-20, 2016

Thursday, March 17 | John 17:20-26

In October 2015, devastating floods wreaked havoc on many parts of South Carolina, especially in Columbia, home to the University of South Carolina. I lived in Columbia while in college, so a part of my heart is there and that city feels like home. Watching the news and seeing water rise over a neighborhood I once called my own was sad and scary. That Saturday, I watched USC play LSU. The game was supposed to be a home game, at Williams-Brice stadium, but due to the flooding, there was no way that was going to happen. LSU generously opened their field and city to the Gamecocks. And all week, I heard reports of resources pouring in from rival schools. It was sweet to see people look past rivalries to help others in need.

I think about that flood when I read John 17 because that is a tiny picture of the unity Jesus is calling His followers to in these verses. Now, this is the last prayer recorded in the gospels before the cross, so we know that whatever Jesus is praying here is especially important! And He takes the time to pray for us – and specifically prays that we would be unified. What does this unity look like? Jesus affirms again and again that our unity should look like His unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit - who live in perfect harmony with one another. And why are we united? We are united because we are God's children. The cross breaks the world's boundaries and creates a unity that no one can break. Now, sure, there are differences between denominations, and conflict exists as a result of the Fall – but Jesus makes it clear in these verses that our unity with one another is one of the ways the gospel is proclaimed (John 17:23).

How do we have this kind of unity, the kind of unity that seeks to love others well, to look past insignificant differences, and to focus on making the gospel known? By remembering the love of the Father made known to us by the work of Jesus (John 17:26). It might be a silly example, but that day, as I watched LSU show such hospitality to my team, I thought about how things like natural disasters break barriers such as differences in team affiliations. How much more should the blood of Christ and the stamp of the Holy Spirit break down barriers and walls in our faith communities, that we might be one?



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SIX: JOHN 16:1-18:40

AMY JACKSON

MARCH 14-20, 2016

Friday, March 18 | John 18:1-40

There's so much going on in this passage. These verses are familiar to me, but reading them again this winter, I was struck by Jesus' character and response to His betrayal and arrest.

John tells us in verse 4 that this arrest was no surprise to Jesus, who "knew all that would happen to him." Though He is fully human, He is also fully God and knows what is next. Peter goes forth to protect Christ – but Jesus rebukes Him, asking, "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" Jesus, fully God and fully man, knowing what is ahead, stands ready and prepared to face what is next, despite the agony He knows is coming.

As we think about Easter, we often speak of Jesus paying the penalty for our sins on the cross. He has paid the debt for our sin and transgression before the Father. He paid a debt that we owed and has justified us before the Father. But at the same time, Jesus also lived a perfect life – which we could never do – and when we place our faith in Him, we are given his righteous record instead of our own. We think of all the ways we fail to live up to Christ's standard, but through salvation, we are given Christ's perfect record and a righteousness that we do not deserve.

We see here that Jesus drinks the cup given to Him, the cup we could never drink. He lives in perfect obedience to the Father. We see Peter responding to his arrest in violence (John 18:10) but Jesus answers with grace and mercy when attacked. We see Christ's disciples abandon Him (John 18:15-18, 25-27), but Jesus remains faithful to the Father (and to his own) to death, even death on a cross. We see the Jews choose to free a guilty robber named Barabbas; Christ, innocent before God and men, fulfills Isaiah's words that He would be oppressed and afflicted but would not defend Himself – "like a lamb that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

That God would come to die for us is astonishing. And that He would do it in this way, enduring such shame and scorn, is even more astounding and moves my heart to worship. Praise God that Jesus drank the cup given to Him, so we can have forgiveness. Praise God that Jesus lived a perfect life and remained faithful unto death, so that we might reap the benefit of a restored relationship with God and can claim His righteous record as our own! Praise God that He came and died, and because He died, we can live!

Saturday, March 19 - Sunday, March 20 | John 16:1-18:40

Read John 16:1-18:40 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SEVEN: JOHN 19:1-21:25

WAYNE SPLAWN

MARCH 21-27, 2016

Monday, March 21 | John 19:1-16

In the passage for today, we read John's account of Jesus appearing before Pilate. John makes a couple of things very clear about Jesus' trial. First, Jesus is innocent of the charges that have been brought against Him. Pilate agonized over this aspect of Jesus' trial. He is at a loss as to why the crowds wanted to condemn and crucify an innocent man. Second, God is in control of everything that is about to happen to Jesus. Pilate mistakenly thinks that he is in control of the situation and he is puzzled as to why Jesus is not more cooperative. However, Jesus makes it clear that God the Father is in control of this situation. Any authority that Pilate has is an authority that is granted to him by God.

As we enter the final week of Lent, we would do well to reflect on these two aspects of Jesus' trial. Ask God to remind you of the grace that He has extended to you through Jesus. Though Jesus was innocent, He suffered the punishment we deserved so that we might be saved. Also, ask God to remind you of the truth that He is in control. At times, our lives are seemingly characterized by chaos and confusion. In such times, we need to be reminded that God is always in control and that He will accomplish His good purposes in our lives.

Tuesday, March 22 | John 19:17-42

Crucifixion was a cruel and humiliating form of execution. Here in John 19:17-42, John records that a sign was placed above Jesus' head that read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The sign was obviously an attempt to mock Jesus' claims to be king. Everyone in Jesus' day would have known that this is not how a king is treated. Kings reign in power on a throne, but here King Jesus is mocked and killed. Their message was clear: this is what happens to all who would challenge the authority of Rome.

All throughout his earthly ministry, the disciples and others had assumed that Jesus would fulfill their kingly expectations. They thought that Jesus would reign on an earthly throne and they sought to have positions of power in His kingdom. They were so consumed with this expectation of Jesus' earthly ministry that they could not understand what Jesus meant when He repeatedly told them that He would be killed in Jerusalem. Here on the cross, Jesus redefines our earthly understandings of power and greatness. Rather than showing His sovereignty and power by defeating His enemies, Jesus gives up His life on the cross so that His enemies might be reconciled to God. Jesus willingly endures the cross so that we might be reconciled to God. Jesus' crucifixion does not invalidate His claims to be king. Instead, it serves to remind us of exactly what kind of king we serve. Jesus is the king who willingly lays down His life for his people. May we worship this king in spirit and truth today!



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SEVEN: JOHN 19:1-21:25

WAYNE SPLAWN

MARCH 21-27, 2016

Wednesday, March 23 | John 20:1-18

When John 19 comes to an end, it is clear that those gathered by Jesus' cross believe that Jesus' ministry had ended. Death, they believe, is the sign that Jesus had been defeated by His earthly enemies. So, they make the appropriate preparations and lay Jesus' body in a tomb.

Here in John 20, we find that they are wrong. Mary Magdalene makes her way to the tomb expecting to find the body of Jesus, but His body is not there. Instead, there are only linen cloths that had been used to wrap Jesus' body. Mary assumes that someone has taken Jesus' body and she goes to inform the disciples. This is the only possible explanation Mary can think of because she and the other disciples did not understand what Jesus meant when He referred to being raised from the dead.

Mary does not understand these things until she encounters the risen Christ in the garden. At first she does not recognize Him. It is only when she hears Jesus call her name that she understands what has happened. Jesus has overcome death and the grave. He has been resurrected!

The resurrection is central to our Christian faith. Apart from the resurrection we have no reason to believe that our sins have been forgiven or that we will be raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:17-19). But, because the resurrection did happen, we have hope in the face of death. Because of the resurrection, we are able to grieve as those who have hope. The resurrection is also an important reminder that Christianity is not primarily a system of morality. Yes, the Bible is filled with commands that God's people should follow because of their love and gratitude to God. However, our faith is not based on our attempts to be good people. Our faith is founded on God's decisive act of raising Jesus from the dead! Rejoice in the resurrection today. Make a conscious effort to remember that your hope and security in this life and in the life to come are firmly rooted in what God has done rather than in what you can do.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SEVEN: JOHN 19:1-21:25

WAYNE SPLAWN

MARCH 21-27, 2016

Thursday, March 24 | John 20:19-31

In John 20:19-31, the disciples are gathered behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. The disciples knew that they too might be crucified because of their association with Jesus. So, there they were, hiding and cowering in fear.

Then, all of a sudden, Jesus shows up. Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt in this moment? What will Jesus say to His disciples?

First, Jesus sends them out on mission. As the Father has sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus sends the disciples. This commission is a powerful reminder for those of us who are Jesus' disciples. As we have already seen in the Gospel of John, Jesus has called us to go into the world and make Christ known through our lives. Jesus did not sit back and wait for us to find our way to him. Instead, He came and identified with us so that we might be made right with God. How might God be calling you to go into the world to make Christ known?

Second, Jesus deals gently with Thomas. Thomas doubts the resurrection and states that he will not believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead unless he places his finger into Jesus' nail-scarred hands and places his hand into Jesus' side. Thomas eventually gets this opportunity. Jesus appears to Thomas eight days later and invites Thomas to touch Him. After encountering the resurrected Jesus, Thomas believes. Jesus then states that those will be blessed who believe in Him even though they have not seen Him.

How does this type of belief come about? In verses 30-31, John writes that he has written his gospel account so that people will come to believe in Jesus. How might you grow in your faith in Christ? Read the Bible and ask God to strengthen your faith in Jesus. How can you reach out to people who do not yet believe in Jesus? Encourage them to read the Gospel of John and pray that God would give them eyes of faith to see the truth and beauty of Jesus so that they might have life in His name.



GOSPEL OF JOHN

WEEK SEVEN: JOHN 19:1-21:25

WAYNE SPLAWN

MARCH 21-27, 2016

Friday, March 25 | John 21:1-25

John closes out his gospel with one final account of Jesus appearing to the disciples. In this episode we read of an important conversation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus repeatedly asks Peter if he loves Him. Each time Peter affirms his love for Jesus and after the third question, Peter is grieved. He surely feels that Jesus should know how he feels about Him.

There has been much speculation as to why Jesus asked Peter this question three times. The text does not give the reader insight into Jesus' motive for his repeated questioning of Peter, but it seems as if Jesus is helping Peter to reflect on his love for Jesus because of the challenges that Peter will soon face. Peter is given the task of feeding Jesus' sheep and is told that he will one day lay down his life because of his commitment to Jesus. Peter responds by questioning what will happen to John, but Jesus redirects Peter's focus to his situation. God's plans will certainly come to pass in the life of each of Jesus' disciples even though those plans will not be the same for each of them. Peter's focus should not be on others. Peter must simply focus on his affection for Jesus and his willingness to obey Jesus no matter the cost.

The same is true for us today. We are challenged to ask, "Do I love Jesus?" If we answer this question in the affirmative, we must be ready to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus wherever He leads. Being a disciple of Jesus will not always be easy. The cost of discipleship will often be high. However, we must remember that following Jesus is the only life worth living. It is only as we surrender our will to Jesus' will and walk in obedience that we will experience the abundant life that Jesus would have each of us to know.

Saturday, March 26 - Sunday, March 27 | John 19:1-21:25

Read John 19:1-21:25 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.