

Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



April 2011 John 1 – 11 Reading & Discussion Guide

April Dates to Note:

MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

READING ASSIGNMENT: John Chapters 1 – 11

PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION:

- Mpls and West:** Monday, April 4 at 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
(No Pastor's Introduction at West this month due to New Member Dinner on April 7.)

MEMORY VERSE:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. – John 6:35

BEFORE YOUR APRIL SMALL GROUP MEETING

Getting Started

1. Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a "message" just for you!
2. We suggest you read through "John 1 – 11: Theme and Purpose" on page 3 and "Who or What Is . . . ?" on page 4 before you begin your reading of John 1 – 11.
3. Use the "To Guide Your Reading" section on pages 5 & 6 to help you think through what you have read, paying particular attention to the questions in boldface.

April's Assigned Reading: John 1 – 11

If you want to know more than we provide in this guide about the historical context, the theological themes, and the background to Romans, we highly recommend Luther Seminary's excellent site, www.enterthebible.org.

April's Memory Verse

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. – John 6:35

John: Theme & Purpose

SUMMARY

John's Gospel begins by announcing that God's Word, which brought all things into being, became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. A word is a form of communication, and John stresses ways in which God speaks to the world through Jesus. Jesus communicates the will of God by the words he speaks, by the miracles he performs, by the death he dies in love for others, and by rising to life. The gospel story takes place on the earth, but at its heart is the way God is made known to the people of the world. Through his crucifixion, Jesus lays down his life, giving God's love to the world. By rising from the dead he shows that those who believe in him have everlasting life. John's Gospel was written that people might believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, who gives people the gift of eternal life through his life, death, and resurrection (John 20:30-31).

WHO WROTE IT AND WHEN?

John's Gospel is based on the testimony of the unnamed "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20-25). Many early Christian writers thought he was John the son of Zebedee, although many recent scholars conclude that the beloved disciple's identity remains unknown. . . . [It] was probably completed around 90 C.E., after the death of this beloved disciple. . . . Although John is traditionally said to have been the last Gospel completed, it is probably not much later than Matthew and Luke.

FULFILLMENT OF SCRIPTURE

John's Gospel sometimes says that something in Jesus' ministry was done "to fulfill the Scripture." [Interestingly] the Old Testament passages that are quoted rarely sound like predictive prophecy. For example, Jesus says that his opponents fulfilled the Scripture that says, "They hated me without a cause," something that other people also experienced (John 15:25; Psalm 35:19). In John, the fulfilling of Scripture often means that something discloses the full meaning of Scripture. In the case just cited, opposing the Son of God reveals the full extent of human hatred. The quotations are used to show the meaning of something, rather than as predictions that are fulfilled.

JESUS' HUMANITY AND DIVINITY

John's Gospel gives special attention to the divinity of Jesus, identifying him with the Word that was with God and was God (1:1). In conversations, Jesus calls himself the "I Am," echoing the name of God given in Exodus 3:14, and even says, "The Father and I are one" (10:30). At the same time, the Gospel also is clear that Jesus is a human being, for in him God's Word became "flesh" (1:14). Jesus becomes tired and troubled; he weeps and dies (4:6; 11:35; 13:21; 19:30). The Gospel writer did not need to emphasize Jesus' humanity, since everyone took it for granted, but he did have to argue that Jesus truly was from God and embodied the Word of God, since that was the disputed issue. When reading the Gospel, it is important to keep in mind that the humanity of Jesus is assumed throughout the story.

JOHN AND THE OTHER GOSPELS

The other three gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are called the synoptic gospels (from the Greek *syn* "together" and *opsis* "view") because of the many similarities they share. Not only are the same events and speeches included, but they are included in a very similar order. There are differences, such as the words to the Lord's Prayer, but often they agree word for word. John, however, differs from the other three gospels in several ways, including 1) the sequence of events; 2) primary location (Judea and Jerusalem as opposed to Galilee); 3) how Jesus teaches (about himself and his purpose, using longer narratives, as opposed to the short, pithy sayings and parables); 4) his miracles are presented first and foremost as signs that point to his true glory, and less as works of compassion).

Who or What Is . . . ?

Glory. In a simple sense glory is the honor that people receive from other people (12:43), but in the fuller sense glory is the revelation of divine power and presence. Jesus reveals divine glory by works of power (2:11) and by laying down his life, which reveals the glory of divine love (12:23-25). After his resurrection, Jesus resumes his heavenly glory and prepares a place for his followers to share in it (17:1, 24).

Jesus as Messiah. The Messiah or "anointed one" was expected to be a king, who would rule over God's people. The hope for the Messiah grew out of God's promise that the heir to David's throne would have an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-13). John declares that Jesus is the one in whom God's promises are fulfilled.

Jesus as Son of God. The expression *Son of God* was associated with kingship in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 7:13-14; Psalm 2:7-8). In John's Gospel, it also points to Jesus' heavenly origin. . . .He has come from God and embodies the power and presence of God.

Judgment. People come under God's judgment by rejecting the Christ whom God has sent. By way of contrast, they find life by coming to faith, since faith is the way people relate rightly to God. John's Gospel sometimes speaks of a final judgment at the end of time (5:28-29), but also says that judgment already occurs when people refuse to believe.

Life and eternal life. People have life in one sense as long as they are alive physically, yet true life is found only in relationship with God. Faith is the means to life because through faith people relate to the God who made them. This life is called eternal life because it is life in relationship with the eternal God (17:3). Life begins now in faith and continues beyond death through the power of resurrection (5:24; 11:25-26).

Signs. Signs are things that point beyond themselves. The miraculous acts that Jesus performs are called "signs" [in John] because they point beyond [the act itself], to the power and the presence of God (2:11).

Sin. At its most basic level, sin is a broken relationship with God, and this in turn is expressed in sinful actions against other people. The opposite of sin is faith. Therefore, identifying sin as unbelief is another way of saying that it is rooted in a broken relationship with God (16:9).

[Holy] Spirit. The Spirit reveals Jesus' identity (1:33-34) and brings people to faith, which is called new birth (3:3-8). The Spirit is sometimes called Advocate or Counselor, because it brings people to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and empowers them in witness (14:26; 15:26-27).

Word of God. The ELCA understanding of the *Word of God* is: 1) God's incarnate Word made flesh in Jesus, living among us; 2) The word of God proclaimed and heard as law (that which convicts) and gospel (that which frees); and 3) The recorded Word of God in the scriptures.

With the exception of "John and the Other Gospels" on page 3 and "Word of God" above, the information on pages 3 and 4 is drawn from Luther Seminary's www.enterthebible.org's introduction to John, written by [Craig R. Koester, Professor of New Testament](#). Used with permission.

To Guide Your Reading

The following questions are offered to guide your reading and personal reflection. Use the space between questions to jot down your responses. **Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest you consider first at your small group meeting.** Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest and concern to the group.

- In Chapters 1 – 4, Jesus reveals himself to the disciples, to the Jews of Galilee, to Nicodemus, and to the Samaritan woman at the well. Through many “signs” or miracles, he reveals his glory. As you read, think about each encounter: What is happening? What understanding takes place? What is the response of the person or people? How is faith exhibited?
 - In Chapters 5 – 11, division and opposition to Jesus begin to grow. As you read, look for what the divisions are and what is behind the opposition.
1. **Read the explanation of *Word of God* from *Who or What Is . . . ?* on page 4, then the prologue to John (1:1 - 18) . The word of God, which spoke all things into being, becomes flesh in Jesus. How does that help you understand the full nature of Jesus? What insights into Jesus’ purpose among us does this give you?**
 2. In John 1:19 – 51, we meet John the Baptist. In John 3:22-36, we meet him again. What words or phrases do you find that explain who John is and his relationship to Jesus?
 3. In John 2:12 – 25, Jesus drives the merchants out of the temple in Jerusalem temple, then indicates that in the future his crucified and risen body will be the center for worship. How did you react to Jesus’ display of anger? Why did he do it? What about what Jesus says might have angered faithful Jews who heard it?
 4. John 3:16 is one of the best-known and beloved verses in the Bible? Why do you think this is so? Try to recall the first time you read or heard it or earliest memory of it. What did it mean to you then? Now?
 5. **Most of Jesus’ miracles that John includes in his gospel are in these first eleven chapters: 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-9; 6:1-14, 19-21; 9:1-7. 11:1-44 (also 21:1-11). John refers to them as “signs,” emphasizing that they are to be seen as evidence of Jesus’ divine glory, not simply as acts of compassion. How do you define *miracle*? Did any of Jesus’ miracles have special meaning for you or help you better understand Jesus’ nature and purpose? Have you ever heard of or witnessed something you would consider to be a miracle?**

6. Leading up to the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, it says Jesus “had to go through” to Samaria (4:4). Geographically, he did not, and in fact, due to the great animosity between them, Jews and Samaritans went out of their way to avoid each other. Also, contact with Samaritans made Jews ritually “unclean” (thus requiring ritual cleansing). What is the result of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman? How does help to explain why Jesus “had to go through” Samaria?
7. **Unique to John are eleven “I am” statements (four of which are the same or similar). Eight of these are in the first eleven chapters: 6:35; 6:51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7; 10:9; 10:11,14; 11:25, 26 (others are 14:6 & 15:1; 15:5). These “I am” statements are more than images; in the Greek, these are emphatic statements that reveal Jesus’ purpose and role in our lives and salvation. Do any of these images have special meaning for you or reveal something new to you about Jesus? Explain.**
8. Also in these first eleven chapters of John are five of seven other “I am” (or “it is I”) statements (4:26, 6:20; 8:24; 8:28; 8:58). In these, Jesus is using “I” or “I am” to recall God’s use of “I AM” in the same way God used it in Exodus 3:14: *“God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you.”* (See in particular, John 8:58.) What is the difference between how Jesus reveals himself to us in the descriptive “I am” statements and these?
9. Chapters 5 – 11 provide evidence of division and in some quarters a growing hostility toward Jesus as he moves closer to the events of Holy Week and Easter. In what events, reactions, or statements do you see division among the disciples? The people? The rulers?
10. **The first eleven chapters of John take us up to Holy Week. In these chapters, the writer is establishing Jesus’ glory as the Son of God and the giver of eternal life. Through these various stories, it is clear that some people who encountered Jesus “got” this more than others. Imagine yourself as one or more of the people in these stories. How do you think you would react? How did Jesus react when people failed to understand? What encouragement, hope, confusion, or other reactions do you find in these encounters?**

AT YOUR APRIL SMALL GROUP MEETING

Welcome

Welcome to the April meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

Opening Prayer

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with their own prayer and/or pray the following:

*O God,
Fill us now with your Holy Spirit, so that we may together find understanding and joy in your Word
and take delight in learning more about it and your wonderful love for us.
Amen.*

This Month’s Memory Verse

Recite this month’s memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. – John 6:35

Getting Under Way

All around us are signs of spring! Hallelujah! Share together your favorite signs of spring. Why is it a favorite? Does it make you feel blessed in any way? Does it reveal or remind you of anything about God?

Setting the Scene

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended the Pastor’s introduction to John 1 - 11 to share what they learned.

Discuss Together

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 5 & 6. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that particularly struck members of your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

Closing Remarks and Prayer

FOR NEXT MONTH

Be certain everyone has been given or can download May's small group guide, which focuses on John 12 – 21 (www.mtolivet.org/livingthemessage.html). Remind everyone of your next meeting date, which you can note either below or on the cover page of the May small group guide if you are passing it out today. Draw attention, too, to the dates for the Pastor's introduction to John 12 – 21.

Our May meeting will be:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

May's reading assignment is: JOHN 12 – 21

May's memory verse is:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

– John 14:1

The Pastor's Introduction to John 12 – 21 will take place:

- Mpls:** Monday, May 2, at 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Thursday, May 5, at 7:00 p.m., Room 310, CFL Bldg.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gather prayer concerns from the group. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns are brought to God. End with a prayer(s) of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following prayer together:

Dear Lord,

As marvelous as you created us to be, we can never be "good enough" to earn or deserve all that you have given us, most especially your gracious gift of love and salvation. Let us never forget the magnitude of that gift, but instead grant us generous hearts to live in grateful response to it. Grant us, too, the courage and the means to share our faith in ways that reach the hearts of those who have yet to know you and the power of your love.

Your Word assures us that you are with us in all things, and so we give our cares and concerns to you and thank you for our blessings and joys. Be with us now as we go on our separate ways.

Amen.

FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Ponder

“Even though we may think of ourselves as wise and obedient Christians, we cannot entirely evade our tendency as finite and fallen human beings to construct out of the Gospels a Christ we can believe in. Without quite realizing what we are doing, we reduce Christ to what we can manage to conceive, rather than allowing him to challenge us to open our minds and hearts to his immensity. We are predisposed to reduce Christ to what we can cope with, instead of allowing him to enlarge our apprehension of his glory. We thus bring Christ down to our level, rather than allow him to raise us to his.”

– From *Knowing Christ* by Alister McGrath.