

# Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



## May 2011 John 12 – 21 Reading & Discussion Guide

### May Dates to Note:

#### MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Person to Contact with Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

**READING ASSIGNMENT:** John Chapters 12 – 21

#### PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION:

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

#### MEMORY VERSE:

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.*  
– John 14:1

# **BEFORE YOUR MAY 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 12 – 21: Theme and Purpose" on page 3 and "Who or What Is . . . ?" on page 4 before you begin your reading of John 12 – 21.
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.

## **May's Assigned Reading: John 12 – 21**

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](http://www.enterthebible.org).

## **May's Memory Verse**

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.*  
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## John: Theme & Purpose

In Chapters 1 – 11, John introduced us to Jesus, his teachings, and his miracles. In Chapters 12 – 21, John will guide us through Jesus' last days here on earth. John's purpose in writing the gospel is clearly stated in 20:31: *"But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."*

### JESUS' CRUCIFIXION

John's account of the crucifixion differs in some ways from those of the other Gospels. Mark's Gospel, for example, tells of the darkness and mockery surrounding Jesus' death and records his final words as, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" By way of contrast, John tells of Jesus entrusting his mother to the beloved disciple and says that his final words were, "It is finished." John's account may not dwell on the brutality of the crucifixion, but it does take its painful reality into account. John tells of Jesus being scourged, forced to carry his cross in public, and having his side pierced with a spear. Since John's readers would have understood the horror of the process, the Gospel does not emphasize it. Instead, it tells the story in a way that helps to disclose the meaning of the crucifixion as a gift of divine love.

### THE LORD'S SUPPER

The other Gospels and 1 Corinthians say that on the night of his betrayal Jesus gave his disciples bread and wine, saying, "This is my body," and, "This is my blood." These are called the "words of institution." John does not include this in his account of the Last Supper, but focuses instead on Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Earlier in John, Jesus calls himself the bread of life, and speaks of people consuming his flesh and blood (John 6:32-35, 48-58). Many assume that this alludes to the words of institution, since the theme is similar. Others do not think this is the case, interpreting the passage as a vivid way to speak about believing in the crucified Christ.

### POST-EASTER PERSPECTIVE

John's Gospel tells the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection from a post-Easter perspective. In other words, in addition to being a record of what Jesus said and did, it includes insights from the time after Jesus' resurrection. [For example,] . . . [the disciples] did not understand what it meant for Jesus to ride toward Jerusalem on a donkey, but after his resurrection they understood it in light of the Old Testament passages concerning a ruler of Israel coming on a donkey (John 12:14-16; Zechariah 9:9). These later insights are included in order to help readers understand the meaning of what Jesus said and did.

### SEEING AND BELIEVING

At the end of John's Gospel, a disciple named Thomas demands proof of Jesus' resurrection, and when Jesus appears to him, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Seeing miracles or resurrection appearances is not a necessary basis for faith. The first disciples follow Jesus when they hear others speak about him. Later, they respond favorably to the miracles, but the miracles are not the basis for their faith. Moreover, the Gospel recognizes that people easily misunderstand the meaning of miracles. For example, Jesus heals a blind man on the Sabbath, which reveals the power of God, but many argue that doing this breaks the law of God and shows that Jesus is a sinner. Seeing does not guarantee believing.

## Who or What Is . . . ?

**Glory / Glorification.** 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 his 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 / Jesus as Son of God.** 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.

While 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 points to Jesus' heavenly origin. . . .He has come from God and embodies the power and presence of God.

**The Jews.** John's Gospel often refers to Jesus' opponents as "the Jews," which can give the impression that the Gospel speaks negatively about Jews in general. Nevertheless, it is clear that Jesus himself is Jewish. Jesus is called a rabbi and he teaches in synagogues and the temple (1:38; 18:20). Since Jesus is Jewish and brings salvation, he can say that salvation is from the Jews (4:22). It is also clear that many of his followers are Jews, who know the Jewish Scriptures (1:45). According to the Gospel, some Jews responded favorably to Jesus and others did not. This was also true of non-Jews, since some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, whereas a Roman like Pilate had Jesus put to death (12:20; 19:10).

**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. Eternal life, which continues beyond death through the power of resurrection (5:24; 11:25-26), comes through faith (17:3), through which we come into relationship with God.

**Satan.** Satan is also called the devil, the evil one, and the ruler of this world (8:44; 12:31; 13:2; 14:30; 16:11; 17:5). John's Gospel understands that the power of evil works through deception, hatred, and death. Jesus defeats the evil one, therefore, with truth, love, and the gift of life.

**[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).

*The information on pages 3 and 4 is drawn from the introduction and background to John on Luther Seminary's site, [www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org). It was written by Craig R. Koester, Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary and is used with permission.*

## To Guide Your Reading

Think of the following questions as an outline to guide your reading and personal reflection. Use the space between questions to jot down your thoughts. **Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest you consider at your small group meeting.** Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest and concern to the group. Let the Spirit lead!

Chapter 12 sets the stage and moves us into the week before Jesus' death.

1. What are Martha, Lazarus, and Mary each doing and what is positive about each? Which of the three best describes how you might be in the Lord's presence? Thinking about Jesus' reactions to each, what can we learn about what he desires from us?
2. Many of the Jews who witnessed Jesus' miracles still did not believe in Jesus as the expected Messiah or Son of God. What does that tell us about miracles as a basis for faith (John 12:37-43; compare Matthew 16:17)?

Chapters 13 – 17 tell of Jesus preparing the disciples for his death.

3. **In 13:1-20, Jesus washes the disciples feet, an act of hospitality usually performed by household servants, not hosts or persons of rank. What do you think Jesus wanted the disciples to understand, and why did he chose to use example instead of words? What does it say about servanthood? About leadership? How might we lift up people or programs in our lives, work, or congregation that may feel or sometimes be treated as if they are of less importance than others?**
4. Why might Jesus' words in 14:1-4 be comforting to the disciples? What comfort do they give you? In what situations might sharing these words bring comfort to others?
5. Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit in 14:15-17, 25-26 and also in 15:26-27, 16:8-15, and 20:22. What names does he give the Spirit, and how do they help you understand the Spirit's work? What other things does Jesus say the Spirit will do? Why can the world not receive the Spirit? What must we do to receive the Spirit?
6. **In 15:1-17, Jesus says we are to "abide" in him just as a branch "abides" in the vine. What happens when a branch is no longer attached to the vine? Does it live and bear fruit? What fruit does Jesus say we will bear if we abide in him?**

7. Jesus says that the disciples are not asking questions because of their great grief (16:5-6). Can you think of circumstances when it might be harder to hear Jesus' words for you?
  
8. John 17 is a long prayer that Jesus prays aloud. What effect might hearing this prayer have had on the disciples? What portions speak most strongly to you? What questions or insights does it raise?

Chapters 18 – 20 tell about Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and three resurrection appearances, and remind us of John's purpose in writing the gospel.

9. As you read 18:1-27, try to put yourself in Peter's place. Where was he? What danger lurked? Were friends or other support close by? What are some ways or situations in which we might deny—or diminish—the importance of Jesus in our lives and faith? By contrast, what do we learn in these verses about Jesus' faithfulness? Courage? Love? Frame of mind?
  
10. What does 19:26-27 tell us about Jesus? What is the significance of Jesus' last words in 19:30? What do they mean to you personally? What do they mean to the lost?
  
- 11. Which of the many injustices and humiliations that Jesus endured most caught your attention and heart? Which would have been hardest for you? Try to truly imagine the agony and horror of Christ's last days and hours happening to a child or loved one of yours. What worth is there in stopping to remember the terrible things the fully human Jesus endured on our behalf?**

Chapter 21 tells of Jesus appearing yet again to the disciples and reinstating Peter, who had denied him.

- 12. The disciples did not recognize Jesus standing on the shore, yet they obeyed him and illogically threw their nets out again (21:1-14). What do you think Jesus meant to teach them by filling their nets to overflowing? What does the story say to us today about watching for Jesus' presence and the power of Jesus directing our lives?**
  
13. Despite Peter's denials and failures, Jesus chooses to restore him and not replace him (21:20-23). As individuals and the church, what can we learn from this about restoring someone who sins and falls away?

# **AT YOUR MAY SMALL GROUP MEETING**

## **Welcome**

Welcome to the May 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:

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank you for the presence of those gathered here. Thank you for the opportunity to reflect upon your last days here on earth. Thank you for the promises we find in the words you spoke during those days—and throughout your time among us. Thank you for the gift of faith and the power and wonder of your enormous love, a love so great as to bear the agony and death of the cross so that we may live. Open now our hearts and minds to hear and understand your message for us today.*

*Amen.*

## **This Month’s Memory Verse**

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

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

– John 14:1

## **Getting Under Way**

Take time for each person to share thoughts on one of the following:

- Share someone in your life or faith experiences who demonstrated “footwashing leadership.”
- What does it mean in your life to “bear good fruit”?

## **Setting the Scene**

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended the Pastor’s introduction to John 12 - 21 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 YEAR

Congratulations! You have been together for eight months now getting to know God's Word and each other better. Thank you for being part of this exciting venture at Mount Olivet. Our hope and prayer is that you will continue to be part of Living the Message in the fall; if that is not possible, please do keep up your Bible reading and exploration in another way.

### Our next meeting will be in October:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Person to Contact with Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reading assignments and memory verses for 2011-2012 will be decided after we consider input from all of you regarding what things have worked particularly well, suggestions you have for making the program better, and so forth. In other words, we will be in touch!**

### Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:

- Mpls:** Monday, October 3, at 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Thursday, October 6, at 7:00 p.m., Room 310, CFL Bldg.

## SURVEY

Before your closing prayer, please take time to go over the survey we have given your small group leader. As you may have heard us say throughout this year, we have felt truly led by the Spirit in launching *Living the Message*. Your wonderful spirit and partnership—to say nothing of innumerable “signs” along the way, give us great confidence that the Spirit continues to lead us. We know the Spirit will lead you, too, as you share your insights and suggestions for moving into the next year. *Our hearts are full of gratitude for you all!* – Pastors Cornils and Wertz and Carol

## 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,*

*Thank you for the opportunity and the freedom to explore your Word. Thank you for the people here and the time and conversation and faith we have shared. We ask your blessing on each one present, and your grace and strength for whatever concerns and burdens we carry. We ask, too, that you will work within our hearts and minds as together with the leadership of our congregation we seek ways to encourage others to be part of exploring your Word. We pray for the resources, energy, and wisdom to put your Word into not only the hands, but the hearts and minds of all our members and more. We ask it not for our glory, but for yours. You have instructed us to spread the gospel; help us in that task. With hearts full of gratitude, we ask this all in your precious name.*

*Amen.*

## **FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING**

### **Ponder**

Taking to heart John's hope that in reading his gospel I "may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [I] may have life in his name," what is my response (John 20:30)? What plan and purpose does God have for my abilities and life? What can I do to help others "come to believe" and know "life in his name"?