

GROWTH GROUP MATERIAL

The Glory of The Son

Studies from
John 12-21

CHRIST
CHURCH
STELLENBOSCH

Welcome to Growth Groups at Christ Church! The aim of these groups is that we grow in our knowledge and love of Christ as we share life and seek to serve him together.



We are committed therefore to prayer, to time reflecting on God's Word, to caring for each other's needs and to reaching out with Jesus' love. Our prayer through these studies is that the Lord would, "fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives" (Col. 1:9).

You will get the most out of this study by reflecting on it personally, participating in group discussion and by prayerfully applying it to your life.

John's Gospel

The Glory of the Son

(12-21)

Study 1 - **The hour has come!** (11:55-12:50)

Study 2 - **Knowing God's love** (13:1-30)

Study 3 - **The Way** (13:31-14:14)

Study 4 - **Another Advocate** (14:15-31)

Study 5 - **The True Vine** (15:1-17)

Study 6 - **Life in the world** (15:18-16:4)

Study 7 - **Return to the Father** (16:5-33)

Study 8 - **I pray for them** (17:1-26)

Study 9 - **Arrest and denial** (18:1-27)

Study 10 - **Jesus on trial** (18:28-19:16)

Study 11 - **It is finished!** (19:17-42)

Study 12 - **Lord and God** (20:1-31)

Study 13 - **Feed my sheep** (21:1-25)

Introduction

As we approach the second half of John's Gospel, it is helpful to clarify three preliminary questions.¹

1. Who wrote the Fourth Gospel?

Like the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the Fourth Gospel does not actually name its author. But, as one writer comments, there is a kind of authorial presence which is "felt" throughout the Fourth Gospel in the references to the beloved disciple (see John 13:23, 19:26-27, 20:2-9 & 21:24) and in the "eye witness" nature of the testimony within its pages. According to John 21:24 it is the beloved disciple who "testifies to these things and who wrote them down." The word "testifies" suggests the work of an eye-witness rather than as is the case of Luke a careful researcher. It thus seems reasonable to identify the author with this beloved disciple.

Who then was this disciple? We know from the Synoptic Gospels that Peter, James and John had a privileged position among the apostles. We also know from John 13:23-24 and 21:20-24 that Peter is to be distinguished from the beloved disciple which leaves James or John as possible contenders. Furthermore, we know that James was martyred toward the end of the reign of Herod Agrippa (*circa* 41-44AD – see Acts 12:1-2) and that he could therefore not have written the Fourth Gospel which dates, probably from the mid-80's. There is certainly no early church tradition linking James to the Fourth Gospel, whereas there is a strong tradition identifying the Apostle John as the beloved disciple. It thus seems reasonable to concur with this tradition and to see John as the author of the Fourth Gospel.

2. What are the main themes of John's Gospel?

Although this question is best answered in the light of a careful study of the content of John's Gospel, it is worth highlighting some things in advance to alert the reader of the Gospel to some important themes and ideas. These, as we shall see in our next study, are certainly introduced and anticipated in the so-called Prologue (John 1:1-18), but they are also highlighted in the purpose statement in John 20:30-31. Four things can be singled out, namely:

- a. **Word / Revelation** primarily concerning Jesus' identity as the Christ and Son of God. The word 'light' is closely connected to this idea of revelation.
- b. **Witness** manifested both in words and 'signs'. Linked with this is the importance of 'truth'.
- c. **Belief** or its opposite, often demonstrated in character sketch e.g. Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman.

¹ Summary taken from study notes by Dr. Mervyn Eloff
<http://www.stjames.org.za/resources/bible-study-notes-2010/>

d. **Life** which is the outcome of faith and the goal of revelation and witness. These key themes are interwoven with other Biblical themes to demonstrate that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has brought His creation purposes to fulfilment.

3. Why was John's Gospel written?

In answering this question, it is important for us to distinguish the themes of the Gospel from its purpose, which is actually clearly stated for us in John 20:30-31. Here John tells us that he has been selective in what he has recorded and that what he has recorded is written so that the reader "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" and that by believing he or she "may have life in His name." It is not entirely clear whether this "believing" is first time faith (conversion) or continuing faith (perseverance). In many ways it is unnecessary to choose between the two, but given that this verse may well be rendered that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God is Jesus it is probably likely that the original purpose of John's gospel was to be an evangelistic tract for Jews of the dispersion, i.e. living outside of Palestine.

These studies are designed to be an interactive guide to help us explore, understand and apply the book together. As always, you will get the most from God's Word by humbly and prayerfully crying out to him for understanding (Prov. 2:3) and being willing to listen and learn from others (Prov. 1:5).

Studies will have the following kinds of questions:



Head – how does this passage challenge us to think differently about God, the world and ourselves?



Heart – how does this passage challenge our deepest affections (hopes, fears, dreams etc.)?



Hands – in what concrete ways does this passage challenge us to live differently as individuals and as a community?



4. Why must Jesus die?



5. What does Jesus say the appropriate response is to himself? Why?



6. Why do some not believe? What will be the outcome if they persist in this?



7. How has following Jesus shaped your life? What do you think an act of extravagant love for Jesus (like Mary's) might look like today?

Study 2

Knowing God's love

13:1-30

Ch. 13-17 make up the famous "Upper Room Discourse" where the focus shifts to Jesus' intimate discussion in his last hours with his disciples. Jesus explains what his coming death will mean for them and their ongoing ministry in a hostile world. Here we hear more clearly than ever what it means to be a follower of Jesus.



Read John 13:1-17

1. What prompts Jesus to wash his disciple's feet? Why do you think Peter first refuses him?



2. What reveals that this act is about more than simply washing feet?



3. What might it mean for us to wash one another's feet today?



Read John 13:18-30

4. Jesus' act of love is framed on either side by Judas' betrayal (v2; v26-30). What reveals that Jesus is still in control of these events?



5. Why do you think Jesus allows Judas into his inner circle, even when he knows that he will ultimately betray him?

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."—C.S. Lewis



6. How was what C.S. Lewis observed true of Jesus' life? How can it be true of ours?



4. Why do you think Philip asks Jesus “show us the Father”? What is striking about Jesus’ response?



5. What will characterize the ongoing lives of believers once Jesus has returned to the Father? What will this mean practically?

“The various religions are like different roads converging on the same point. What difference does it make if we follow different routes, provided we arrive at the same destination?”—Mahatma Gandhi



6. How might you answer Gandhi in light of this passage?



7. What from this passage reassures you of your secure place in the Father’s house?

4. Why do you think Judas asks the question he does? What does Jesus' response show about his focus?



5. How is the Spirit's work in the original disciples similar and different to his work in believers today?



6. What kind of peace is Jesus talking about in v27? How can we experience this peace individually and as a community?

Study 5

The True Vine

15:1-17

Jesus' description of Himself as the True Vine and his disciples as the branches provides a compelling picture of the reality of fellowship with Jesus on a day to day basis. In this study we will explore this metaphor and reflect on how we can bear lasting fruit for Jesus.



Read John 15:1-17

1. How do Psalm 80:8-19 and Isaiah 5:1-7 enrich our understanding of the metaphor Jesus is using here?

2. What is the Father's role in relation to the vine? What does this mean for us?



3. What will ensure that we bear fruit? What does this mean practically?



4. What is the preeminent fruit Jesus has in mind here? What does this look like practically?



5. How do we see God's sovereignty and our responsibility playing out together in the process of discipleship?



6. What encourages you from Jesus' words here?

Study 6

Life in the world

15:18-16:4

In this section Jesus forewarns his disciples about what they can expect as they continue to live in a world that first hated him. This hatred stands in stark contrast with the way believers are to love one another (15:17). Jesus' disciples are not alone, however, and continue to have important work to fulfil.



Read John 15:18-16:4

1. Why will the world hate Jesus' disciples? What must we keep in mind when this happens?



2. What lies behind the world's hatred of Jesus? Are those among whom Jesus first lived more guilty than those who haven't seen him?



3. Is there any encouragement here for Jesus' disciples?



4. How are Jesus' disciples to respond to the hatred of the world? What encouragement is there for them in this?

5. What is Jesus' goal in warning his disciples of what to expect in the world?



6. Do you think we can expect the same persecution today? Why or why not?

3. What will Jesus' return mean for his disciples relationship to the Father (v23-28)?



4. Do the disciples at last understand what Jesus is saying?

5. Which of Jesus' words here particularly encourages you as you continue to live in the world?



Study 8

I pray for them

17:1-26

In this section we get to listen in on Jesus' "High-priestly prayer". This is Jesus' longest recorded prayer and reflects his greatest priorities for himself and for his disciples and their mission. Here we have an opportunity to see into Jesus' heart and are deeply reassured, because we know that the Father will always answer the prayer of his perfect Son.



Read John 17:1-26

1. Who are the various people Jesus prays for here?

2. How does Jesus describe his mission in v2-5?



3. How does Jesus describe his disciples in v6-26? What's the significance of this?



4. What does Jesus pray in v9-26 for those the Father has given him? How does this encourage you?



5. Why does Jesus pray what he does? What's his passion?



6. How have Jesus' disciples historically fared in each of the areas he prays for? Which area do you think we most need to work on today? Practical ideas?

Study 9

Arrest and Denial

18:1-27

In John 18 the focus shifts from the Upper Room to the Kidron Valley. John's concern in his account is to show that Jesus remains in control of events, that his arrest is due to betrayal, and that this is based upon false charges. We also gain important further insights into how Jesus understood his coming death.



Read John 18:1-27

1. What do you think Judas and those who accompanied him were expecting in coming to arrest Jesus? What is the irony in this?

2. What indications are there in v4-9 that Jesus remains in control?



3. How do you interpret Peter's violent action and Jesus' response?

4. Jesus' confession before Annas is framed on either side by Peter's denial. What do we learn in these contrasts about:

a. Peter?

b. Jesus?

c. The religious officials?



5. When have you been tempted to deny Jesus? Why?



6. What do we fundamentally learn in this passage about God, ourselves, and how God's salvation comes?

Study 10

Jesus on trial

18:28-19:16

In this scene, heavy with irony and contrasts, we see Jesus on trial before the Roman governor Pilate. We will have an opportunity to reflect on the charges against Jesus, the nature of Jesus' kingdom and in what capacity Jesus ultimately goes to the cross.



Read John 18:28-19:16

1. What is ironic about the attitude of the Jewish leaders in v28?

2. What contrasts are we meant to draw between the Jewish leaders and Pilate throughout the trial (notice also the structure of the scenes)?



3. What does Jesus mean when he says "My kingdom is not of this world"?

4. Why does Pilate have Jesus flogged and dressed up in a mock regal outfit in 9:1-5 if he thinks Jesus is innocent?

5. What indications are there that God is sovereign over this situation? In what capacity does Jesus go to the cross?

6. What is so tragic about the Jewish leaders final plea to have Jesus crucified?



7. How does Pilate's attitude to Jesus throughout the trial challenge us?



8. How does Jesus' trial help us in confronting injustice in the world?

Study 11

It is finished!

19:17-42

In this passage John recounts Jesus' death and burial in stark and simple terms. We learn once again that Jesus goes to the cross as "King of the Jews", that his death is in fulfillment of the Scriptures and that by his death Jesus accomplishes the work of revelation and redemption which the Father sent him to do.



Read John 19:17-42

1. What is the official charge on which Jesus is executed? What is the irony of this?

2. Jesus seems to be helpless while the soldiers gamble for his clothing. How does John show us that this is not the case?



3. What do Jesus' words to his mother and "the disciple whom he loved" reveal about him?

4. What does John's description of the moment of Jesus' death and the words he speaks stress for us?



5. Read Numbers 9:11-12 and Zechariah 12:10-13:1. In referring to these passages what is John saying about what Jesus' death achieved?

6. Why do you think John so carefully documents what happened to Jesus' body?

7. How do Jesus' words "It is finished" encourage you? How do we sometimes live as if the work of our salvation is not finished?



8. How does John's account help you better understand the nature of sin and the depth of Jesus' love?

Study 12

Lord and God

20:1-31

In this section John recounts four resurrection encounters as powerful facts that transformed the first disciples and that bear witness to a whole new world that Jesus' resurrection has opened up. The key issues that John raises here are the significance of Jesus' resurrection and the relationship between seeing and believing.



Read John 20:1-31

1. What hints are there in the text that this is an eyewitness account?

2. What is it that Peter and the other disciple saw and believed (v1-10)?



3. What does Mary's encounter teach us about the nature of the resurrection and what it takes to believe (v11-18)?

4. What implications of the resurrection does Jesus teach Mary in v17?



5. How does Jesus' risen presence transform his disciples in v19-23? What are the three elements of Jesus' commission?



6. How does Jesus respond to Thomas' doubt in v24-29? What do we learn about the relationship between seeing and believing?



7. What will it take for our family, friends and the world to believe? What can we do about it?

Study 13

Feed my sheep

21:1-25

In this final chapter John recounts one final resurrection appearance. Here Jesus reinstates Peter, reaffirms his commission, confirms his sovereign control over the individual destinies of each of his disciples, and again testifies to the truthfulness of his account.



Read John 21:1-25

1. Why do you think Jesus appears to his disciples at this point and what is he teaching them by this miraculous catch?

2. Why does Jesus ask Peter the same question three times?



3. What does Jesus want Peter to do (and what does this mean):
 - a. for his people?

 - b. as an individual?

4. What does Jesus' response to Peter's question "Lord, what about him?" teach us about the nature of discipleship?



5. In what ways does v24 build confidence in John's message?



6. In what ways does Jesus' call to Peter apply to believers today:

a. to "feed my sheep"?

b. to "follow me"?



7. What encourages you from this passage as you think about Jesus' ongoing mission in the world and the role you can play in it?

Notes