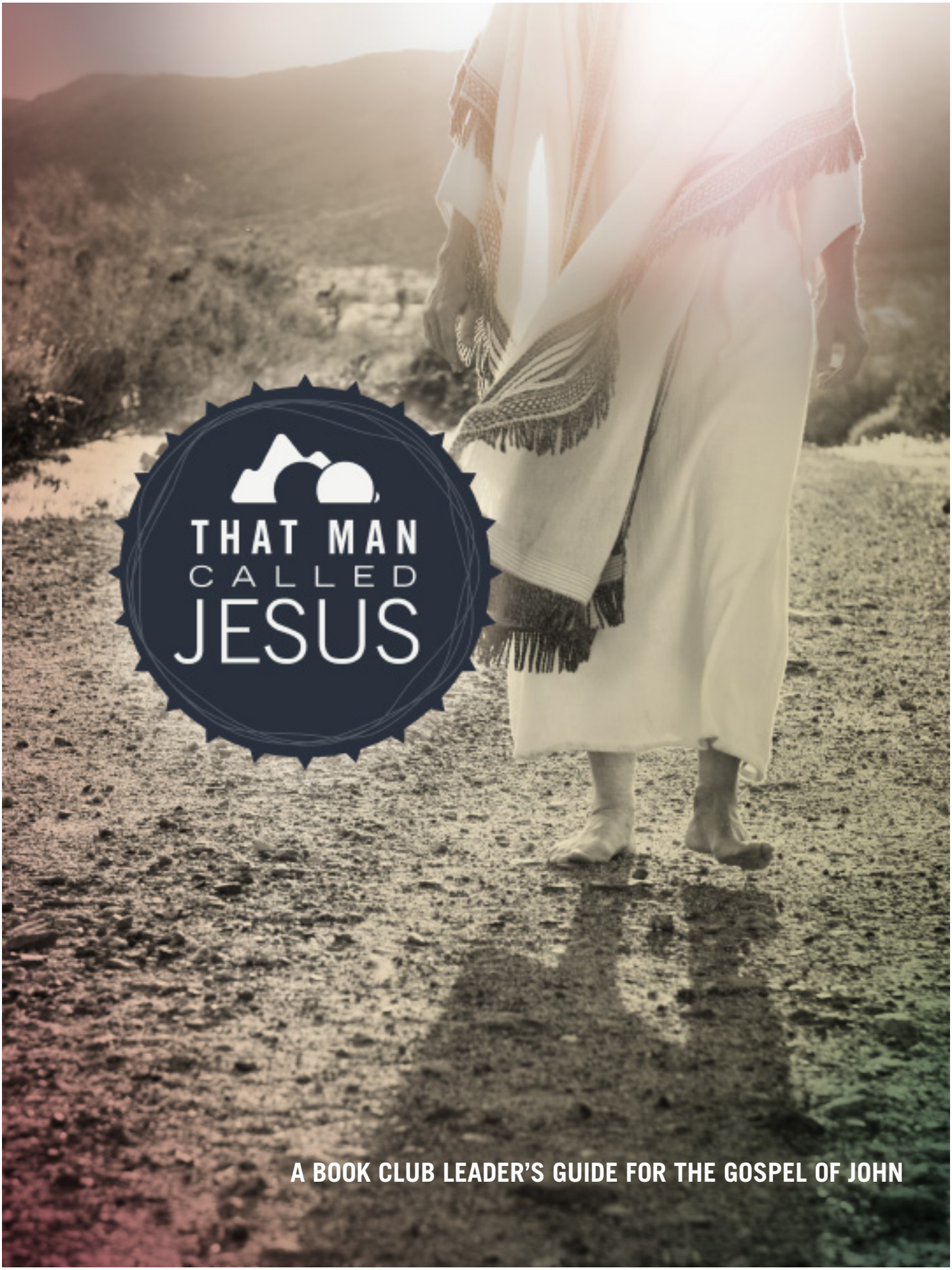

THAT MAN
CALLED
JESUS
A BOOK CLUB LEADER'S GUIDE FOR THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Bartley Sawatsky & Nathan Bryant
©2017 Renew Church
31-6535 Millcreek Dr., Mississauga, ON L5N 2M2

FOREWORD

The booklet in your hands is a guide designed to assist you in facilitating a book club around the Gospel of John. The book club forum is an excellent and refreshing way to create a discussion around the life and teachings of Jesus. Not only is the concept of a book club more inviting than that of a Bible study or class, but the common expectations of a book club are helpful in getting participants to read the book for themselves – an essential part of engaging in intelligent discussion. Here's how it works...

1. A book club leader, preferably someone with a solid understanding of the Gospel of John, invites participants ahead of time to join the book club. They may choose to meet at church on a Sunday morning, in a home, in a public library meeting room, or in a local café or pub.
2. Group size is generally best when capped at about 10 people, especially if the group chooses to meet in a public venue.
3. The club will run for 6 weeks. Participants are strongly encouraged to commit to attending the meetings.
4. Each meeting will last from 1.5 to 2 hours. One hour would be the absolute minimum, but such a short time will limit the amount of discussion.
5. Participants will be required to read the Gospel of John in its entirety prior to the first meeting of the club.
6. The club facilitator will use this leader's guide to frame and give direction to the weekly discussions, ensuring...

    a) that the group has thoroughly discussed each week's theme.
    b) that everyone has a chance to share.
    c) that no one member dominates the discussion.
    d) that no one is made to feel silly for any of their input.
    e) that input that is shared is factual and consistent with the author's intent.

7. Each week the club facilitator will use the leader's guide to introduce the day's discussion and also to give a quick summary at the end of the meeting. They will also remind the participants of the theme for which to prepare for the following meeting and remind them of the meeting time and location.
8. The creators of this guide hope that by the end of the book club, many participants will be interested in knowing more specifically how to embrace the kind of life Jesus describes in the Gospel of John. On week 1, facilitators should let participants know that on week 6 they will share a summary of their personal conclusions on the book. Be prepared to invite participants to engage in one-on-one discussion should they be so interested.
9. Have a great time discussing one of the most popular pieces of literature the world has ever seen!

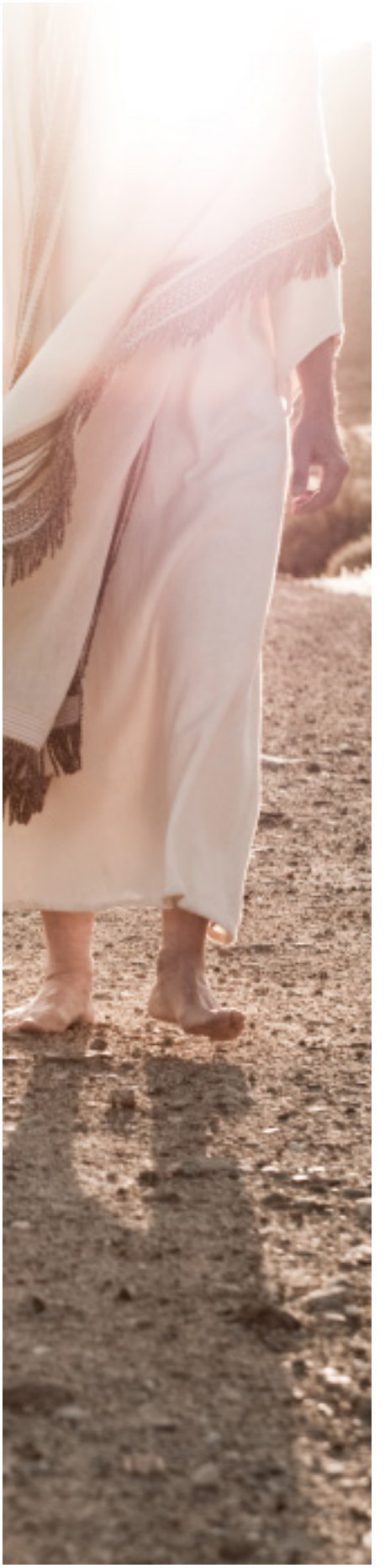
Welcome!

Thanks for being part of our book club. The Gospel of John may be the shortest book you've ever read for a book club, but it will likely foster as much discussion as any lengthy book that you've read.

All of us are required to read the entire book of John prior to the first meeting of the club. This ensures that we can have an intelligent discussion with full participation. Each week the facilitator will introduce a topic of discussion and we will take the time to hear what everyone thinks about what they have read. We will be kind and considerate in our comments and critiques of one another's opinions, but we are free to offer up our own points of view and contest others' points of view.

The goal of the group is threefold:

1. To make some new friends and have some fun.
2. To gain some insight into a classic piece of literature.
3. To arrive at a deeper understanding of John's purpose in writing.



Introduction to The Gospel of John

The book was written somewhere between AD 85-95 by one of Jesus' disciples. John was the youngest of the disciples and one of the three who were part of Jesus' inner circle (along with Peter and James – John's older brother). In his gospel, John refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," signifying that Jesus took a special interest in mentoring him as a teenager.

While the word gospel simply means "good news," it is also a literary form in the Bible. A gospel is a record of the life and teaching of Jesus. John's gospel is one of four gospels in the New Testament and is most unique from the other three. His purpose seems to be to present Jesus as the legitimate Son of God, as can be seen from the concluding words of his book:

> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
>
> **– JOHN 20:30-31**

For the sake of time and interest, we won't be discussing the historicity of the book or entertaining any other "external" discussions about the book. Those discussions are certainly interesting and worthwhile, and participants can do that on their own if they so choose. This club will focus on the internal discussions related to the words and stories themselves. As you will see, there will be more than plenty of discussion topics to engage in.

Though we live in a land of Christian heritage, fewer and fewer North Americans really have a solid grasp of who Jesus Christ was and what he taught. The truth is, if you are not a regular church attendee you probably know very little about him. Our public schools spend very little time on religion, and church and state are so separate that religious discussion is rarely included in public life. You may also be coming to this country from a place where Christianity is not as well known. Whatever your situation, please do not feel guilty about any lack of knowledge you may be feeling. This book club will give all of us a chance to grow in our knowledge.

John's gospel is all about Jesus Christ. Regardless of your religious background, don't be intimidated by that. You will see very quickly that John was not writing about a religion. He was not trying to get anyone to join his church or to "clean up their act." Regardless of our religious background, we can all agree that Jesus was a hugely significant historical figure and that it is worthwhile for us to understand who he was and what he was all about.

The Gospel of John is one of 66 books contained in the Bible. No one has to believe the Bible in order to participate in this book club. There's a good chance many of us haven't even spent much time in it before. Let's just all agree to take John's book at face value like we would any other piece of literature.

Let's strive together for intellectual honesty. For the time being, let's set aside the things we have heard from others about Jesus. This is our chance to read for ourselves what the Apostle John says about him. This is our chance to evaluate firsthand the claims that Jesus made. We may believe him; we may not. But at the end of this book club we will have enough information to begin formulating our own conclusions about him.

Once again, thanks for being part of our club and for completing your reading. We hope it will be an enlightening and enriching experience for you!

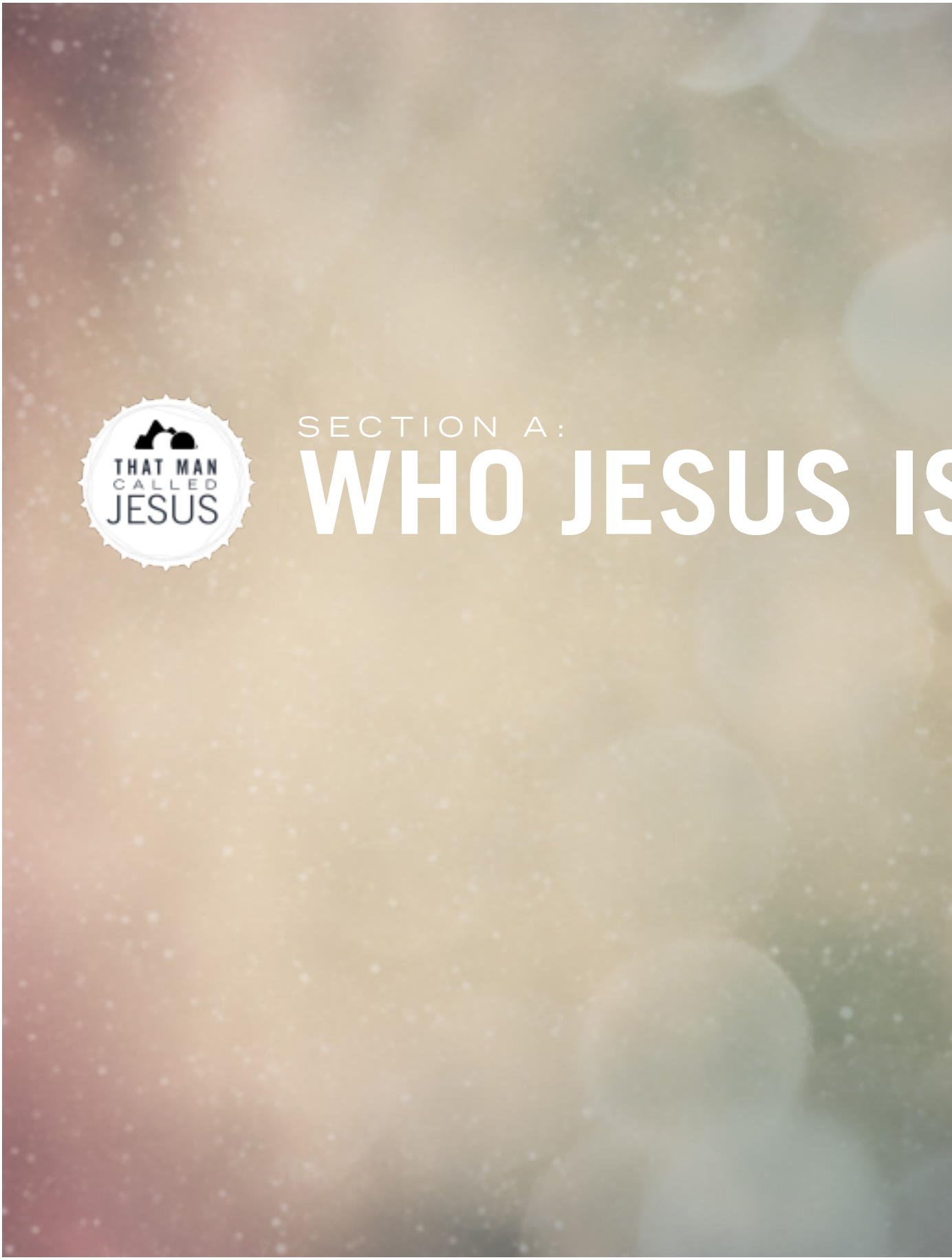
Outline

Section A: Who Jesus Is

Week 1: What Jesus Did
Week 2: What Others Said About Jesus
Week 3: What Jesus Said About Himself

Section B: What Jesus Taught

Week 4: Mankind's Problem
Week 5: God's Solution to Mankind's Problem
Week 6: Mankind's Response to God's Solution



SECTION A:

WHO JESUS IS

Introduction to Week 1

Had Jesus merely been a good man or teacher, it is questionable whether or not he ever would have gained universal prominence. Though his teachings were certainly controversial, it was not simply his words that made people interested in him. It was largely his actions.

History records many incredible acts performed by Jesus. Everywhere he went he attracted large crowds who were eager to see what he would do next. He healed the sick, had power over nature, and even raised people from the dead. Numerous sources attest to the historicity of these events – even religious books like the Koran. His contemporaries attested to his ability to perform the miraculous. Not even his enemies could deny what he did, but chose rather to attribute his power to Satan or demons. They even tried to kill him in order to put an end to his miracles, lest everyone believe in him (John 11:48).

If Jesus were nothing more than a magician, surely he would have been found out. His miracles were almost always done in full view of the public eye. If his disciples were spreading false stories, their writings would surely have been written off as being as ludicrous as the National Inquirer. Yet the Bible is the most read book of all time, and not just for its entertainment value.

As we discuss what Jesus did, think about the implications of Jesus' miracles. Try to relate to those who saw him do such incredible things before their very eyes. Put yourself in their sandals and see how you would have reacted.

Jesus Healed the Sick

Let's look at **JOHN 4:43-54**.

1. After hearing the royal official's request, Jesus makes a strong comment. How do you understand his words?
2. What is noteworthy to you about how Jesus healed the royal official's son?
    - *Jesus never went to see the boy.*
    - *Jesus never asked what the sickness was.*
    - *Jesus never asked where he lived.*
    - *The boy was healed at the exact time Jesus declared that he would live.*
3. How did people respond to this miracle?
    - *The royal official believed.*
    - *His entire family believed.*

Let's look at **JOHN 9:1-34**.

1. What is the big philosophical question the disciples raise in this passage?
    - *Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*
2. Discuss Jesus' answer.
    - *"This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."*
    - *Could God have a purpose in allowing bad things?*
    - *Discuss Jesus' "light of the world" comment and what he was about to do.*
3. What do you think about the action that Jesus requires of the blind man?
4. What questions arise immediately after this miracle?
    - *Was this really the blind man everyone knew? (vv. 8-9)*
    - *How did he get his sight back? (v. 10)*
    - *How can a "sinner" perform miracles like this? (v. 16)*
    - *Is he a prophet? (v. 17)*

5. How do you feel about the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus' miracle and the fact that he healed someone on the Sabbath?
6. The healing of a blind man should have been a reason for great celebration. Why do you think the Pharisees had such a hard time accepting it?
7. What are your impressions of the final conclusion of the man that Jesus healed? (vv. 30-33)
8. What are your impressions of the Pharisees' reaction? (v. 34)

NOTE

The Pharisees were a prominent sect during Jesus' day. As with all of the sects the New testament mentions during that time, they were both political and religious; there was no separation. While the Pharisees believed the Old Testament was inspired by God, they were extreme legalists and added to the Old Testament commands, placing a heavy burden on people. As we will see, Jesus criticized them sharply during his ministry.

Jesus Had Power Over Nature

Let's discuss some of the miracles Jesus performed that showed his power over nature. What things stand out to you from each of these miracles?

JOHN 2:1-11 **Jesus Turns Water Into Wine**

Possible Discussion Points:

- *the cultural implications of running out of wine at a wedding*
- *Jesus' attitude toward celebration, alcohol, and freedom*
- *Jesus' relationship with his mother, Mary*

JOHN 6:1-15 **Jesus Feeds the 5,000**

Possible Discussion Points:

- *Jesus' compassion on the people who were hungry*
- *the very public nature of the miracle*
- *the abundance of the multiplication*
- *the response of the people*

JOHN 6:16-21 **Jesus Walks on Water**

Possible Discussion Points:

- *the bad weather and the fear of the disciples*
- *"immediately" the boat reached the shore*

JOHN 21:1-14 **Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish**

Possible Discussion Points:

- *the context of this appearance, after Jesus' death and resurrection*
- *the mood of the disciples*
- *the disciples' inability to recognize Jesus*
- *the simple but profound nature of the miracle*

Jesus Was All-Knowing

Jesus repeatedly demonstrated that he knew information that he had no humanly possible way of knowing. Discuss your observations from the following passages.

JOHN 2:23-25

- *Knowledge of people's hearts and thoughts.*

JOHN 4:16-19, 28-29

- *Knowledge of a complete stranger's entire life.*

JOHN 10:17-18; 12:23-24, 32-33

- *Knowledge of his coming death and resurrection.*

JOHN 13:18-30

- *Knowledge of who would betray him.*

JOHN 13:38

- *Knowledge of who would deny him.*

Jesus Had Power Over Death

On several occasions, Jesus saved or restored life. Discuss the story of Lazarus, found in John 11:1-44.

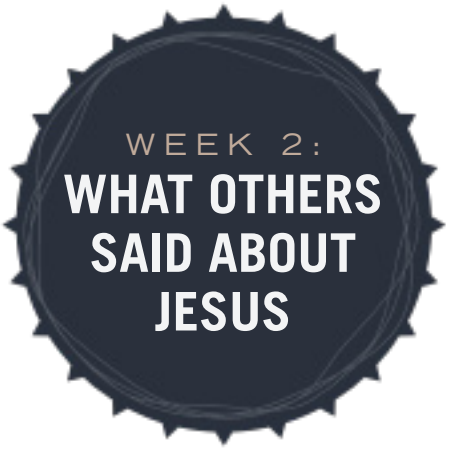
1. When Jesus heard Lazarus was sick, what did he say?
    - *"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory..."*

2. What observations do you make about Jesus' departure to see Lazarus?
    - *Although it was only 2 miles away, it took over 4 days for Jesus to get there!*
    - *Jesus knew he was already dead before they left.*

3. What do you note about Jesus' demeanor compared to that of the family and the disciples?
4. Verses 24-25 contain a loaded proclamation on Jesus' part. How do you understand his words?
5. People seemed upset that Jesus allowed Lazarus to die in the first place. (See v. 37.) Why do you think Jesus allowed it to happen if he could have prevented it?

Jesus Himself Rose From the Dead

The Gospels describe multiple times when Jesus showed mastery over the death of others. In John 20, John tells of Jesus' power over even his own death. Discuss the resurrection story in John 20:1-31 and anything noteworthy you want to share.



Introduction to Week 2

John was a disciple of Jesus. Five different times in his gospel he refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," so it's safe to say that they were very close friends. Probably no other person in history was more qualified to share his thoughts on Jesus than was John. He begins his book with a prologue on his conclusions regarding Jesus Christ. Then he puts his biases aside and tells the story of Jesus' life as he remembers it – the good times with the bad, the sympathetic people with the hostile. He gives the very words that men and women spoke in Jesus' regard.

This week we will focus on those words. In fact, we'll do a scan through the book and refresh our memory on what various people said about him. As we do, let's try to understand the perspective of each speaker – their background, position in life, and vantage point. Evaluate each response as if you were there on the scene as well.

JOHN 1:1-18 > The Apostle John

Before sharing others' opinions about Jesus, John himself comes clean with his personal bias. He says some pretty remarkable things about Jesus (aka "the Word"). Take some time to discuss what he says.

- *He was the "Logos."*
- *He was in the beginning.*
- *He was with God.*
- *He was God.*
- *All things were made through him.*
- *Life was in him and it shone to people around him.*
- *The world didn't recognize him, even though he made us all.*
- *He turns those who receive him into children of God.*
- *He became human and lived on earth. (v. 14)*
- *He has made the invisible God known to mankind. (v. 18)*

JOHN 1:29, 35-36 > John the Baptist

- *He was the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sin of the world.*

JOHN 1:41 > Andrew

- *He was the Messiah (or Christ).*

JOHN 1:49 > Nathaniel

- *The Son of God, the King of Israel.*

JOHN 4:29 > Samaritan Woman

- *"Could this be the Messiah?"*

JOHN 4:42 > Samaritans

- *The Savior of the world.*

JOHN 6:14 > The Crowds

- *The Prophet who is to come into the world.*

JOHN 6:69 > Peter

- *The Holy One of God.*

NOTE

The "Word" (Logos in Greek) was a term used by Greek philosophers going back as early as Heraclitus (535-475 BCE). The Sophists, Aristotle, the Stoics and Philo of Alexandria all used the term. Heraclitus referred to the "Logos" as the unifying principle of order and knowledge, and the Stoics (circa 300 BCE) developed the term to mean the divine animating principle pervading the universe. They went so far as to say it was the ideal around which a person should aim to live their life in order to be in harmony with the universe. So when John uses the term, it is loaded with meaning for his audience.

NOTE

In John chapter 7, John seems to be highlighting the various opinions being shared about Jesus. If you want to focus on a specific passage, this is a good one.

NOTE

Every Jew of Jesus' time was schooled in the Old Testament scriptures. They understood that the scriptures foretold of a **Messiah** who would come – someone from the line of David, sent from God to restore Israel's prominence and bring peace and justice.

NOTE

When John uses the term "**the Jews**", often he is not just referring to the general Jewish population, but religious Jews (especially leaders) and those who followed them.

JOHN 7:12 > The Crowds
- *A good man.*
- *A deceiver.*

JOHN 7:20 > The Crowds
- *He was demon-possessed.*

JOHN 7:40-41 > Some of the People
- *"Surely this man is the Prophet."*
- *"He is the Messiah."*

JOHN 7:46 > The Temple Guards
- *"No one ever spoke the way this man does."*

JOHN 8:48, 52 > The Jews
- *A Samaritan and demon-possessed.*

JOHN 9:17 > The Man Born Blind
- *"He is a prophet."*

JOHN 9:24 > The Jews
- *He is a sinner.*

JOHN 9:30-33 > The Man Born Blind
- *A godly man who was empowered by God.*

JOHN 10:21 > Other Jews
- *He was not demon-possessed because demons don't open the eyes of the blind.*

JOHN 11:27 > Martha
- *"The Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."*

JOHN 12:13 > The Crowd at the Passover Festival
- *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*
- *"Blessed is the king of Israel!"*

JOHN 12:19 > The Pharisees
- *"The whole world has gone after him!"*

JOHN 16:30 > The Disciples
- *He knows all things.*
- *He came from God.*

JOHN 18:29-30 > The Jews

- *He is a criminal.*

JOHN 18:38 > Pilate

- *"I find no basis for a charge against him."*

JOHN 19:6 > Pilate

- *"I find no basis for a charge against him."*

JOHN 19:7 > The Jews

- *"He must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."*

JOHN 19:19 > Pilate's Sign

- *"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."*

JOHN 20:28 > Thomas

- *"My Lord and my God!"*

JOHN 20:30-31 > The Apostle John

- *The Messiah.*
- *The Son of God.*

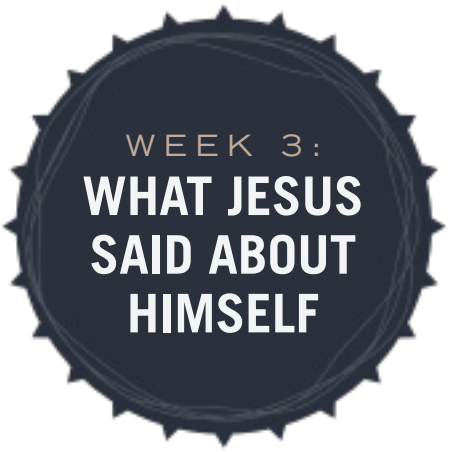
Now that you have refreshed your memory on the things people said about Jesus, take some time to discuss some of the statements that stood out to you.

NOTE

The trial of Jesus is another time when the opinions being shared about him intensify. Be sure to take the time to discuss this section.

NOTE

Matthew's gospel records the words of one of the centurion guards who helped crucify Jesus. After seeing the sky go black and feeling the earth shake, he was terrified and confessed, "Surely he was **the Son of God**." (Matthew 27:54)



Introduction to Week 3

We have now examined what Jesus did and what conclusions others have drawn about him. Now it is time to see what he said about himself. If Jesus wasn't claiming to be anyone great or special, then there is really nothing left to do but examine his teachings as one would the teachings of any religious figure. If he was indeed claiming to be someone special, what are the ramifications?

Again this week we will do a survey of the book, but this time examining Jesus' claims about himself as they are recorded by John. Remember that the words John records are ones that he too had to deeply ponder at one time. Look at the context of each verse. Examine together the full weight of his statements and the metaphors he employs. By the end of this week's discussion we should have a solid base of information by which to begin forming our own conclusions about Jesus.

JOHN 4:25-26 > To the Samaritan Woman

- *I am the Messiah.*

JOHN 5:16-18 > To the Jews

- *God is my Father (claiming equality with God).*

JOHN 5:21-23 > To the Jews

- *I give life like the Father.*
- *The Father entrusts judgment to me.*
- *I am worthy of the same honor as the Father.*
- NOTE: *These ideas are repeated elsewhere. See also John 5:24-26, 6:27, 6:47, 6:51, 6:54, 6:58, 8:51, 10:28, and 11:25-26.*

JOHN 5:26-27 > To the Jews

- *I have life in myself (am self-dependent).*
- *I have the authority to judge.*

JOHN 5:36 > To the Jews

- *My works testify that I was sent by the Father.*

JOHN 5:39 > To the Jews

- *The Old Testament scriptures testify about me.*

JOHN 6:27 > To the Crowds that Followed Him After Being Fed

- *God the Father has placed his seal of approval on me.*

JOHN 6:35 > To the Crowds that Followed Him After Being Fed

- *I am the bread of life.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What is the connection between Jesus claiming to be the "bread of life" immediately after performing the miracle of feeding the crowd of over 5,000?

JOHN 6:41-42 > To the Jews

- *I am the bread that came down from heaven.*

NOTE

In the Jewish mind, the appellation of "**son**" often designated more than just a physical, filial relationship. To be a "son" or "daughter" of someone meant to be "one after the kind of" someone. That's why in 1 Peter 3, the Apostle Paul said women are "daughters" of Abraham's wife, Sarah, when they follow her example. It is also why Jesus said that if we love our enemies, like God does, that we will be children (literally: "sons") of our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:44-45). So when Jesus claimed to be God's "son", both John and the Jews understood the claim he was making.

NOTE

If you read further in John 6, you will see that Jesus was clearly comparing himself with **the manna that God gave to the Israelites in the wilderness**. Discuss the comparison that Jesus is making between himself and the manna.

NOTE

By **the extreme reaction of Jewish religious leaders**, who want to kill Jesus upon hearing his words "Before Abraham was born, I am!", it is apparent that Jesus was making a powerful statement that the Jews considered blasphemous. Every Jew present would have understood that Jesus was not only claiming to have existed before their patriarch, Abraham, but also that he was taking on himself the personal name of God (Yahweh) that God used for himself when talking with Moses (Exodus 3:14).

NOTE

"Son of Man" is a term Jesus often used for himself. It was drawn directly from the book of Daniel.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

In Aramaic, the phrase *bar enash* (son of man) simply means human being, denoting that the Messiah to come would be a human being. Jesus used the term to show that he was indeed a human being, but also that he was the promised Messiah, who was given authority, glory and sovereign power.

JOHN 8:12 > To the People, Jews and Pharisees Included

- *I am the light of the world.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:
What do you suppose Jesus meant by this statement?

JOHN 8:24 > To the People, Jews and Pharisees Included

- *One must believe in me or they will die in their sins.*

JOHN 8:46 > To Jews Who Showed Initial Interest

- *Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?*

JOHN 8:58-59 > To Jews Who Showed Initial Interest

- *Before Abraham was born, I am!*

JOHN 9:35-37 > TO THE MAN BORN BLIND

- *I am the Son of Man.*

JOHN 10:7-9 > To the Pharisees

- *I am the gate.*
- NOTE: *Commentators Kenneth Bailey and George Beasley-Murray explain how in the summer, sheep were sometimes kept out in the pasture overnight. The pen used was simply an enclosure made of piled rocks; there was neither roof nor door, but thorns along the top of the rock walls to protect the sheep from wild animals. The shepherd himself slept in the entrance, his own body serving as the door, or gate. With this context, discuss the significance of Jesus using the metaphor of himself.*

JOHN 10:11-14 > To the Pharisees

- *I am the good shepherd.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What do you suppose Jesus meant by this metaphor?

JOHN 10:24-25 > To the Jews

- *I am the Messiah and my works prove it.*

JOHN 10:30-33 > To the Jews

- *"I and the Father are one." (I am God.)*

JOHN 11:25 > To Martha

- *I am the resurrection and the life.*
- *Whoever believes in me will live, even if they die.*
- *Whoever is living and believes in me will never die.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What does Jesus mean by "the resurrection and the life"? What kind of death do you think he is talking about here – physical, spiritual, or both?

JOHN 12:44 > To the Crowd

- *To believe in me is to believe in God (who sent him).*

JOHN 12:45 > To the Crowd

- *To see me is the same as seeing the one who sent me (God).*

JOHN 13:13 > To the Disciples

- *I am your teacher and Lord.*

JOHN 14:6 > To the Disciples

- *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*
- *No one comes to the Father but through me.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

These words seem very exclusive. Discuss the implications of these very strong statements Jesus is making.

NOTE

Some have argued that Jesus was not fully claiming divinity by using the words "**I and the Father are one**", but the Jewish religious leaders obviously believed he was. When pressed on it, Jesus did not deny the claim, but continued to point to his amazing works as proof of his identity.

JOHN 14:7-9 > To the Disciples, Especially Thomas and Philip

- *To know and see me is to know and see the Father.*

JOHN 15:1, 5 > To the Disciples

- *I am the true vine.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What do you suppose Jesus meant by this metaphor?

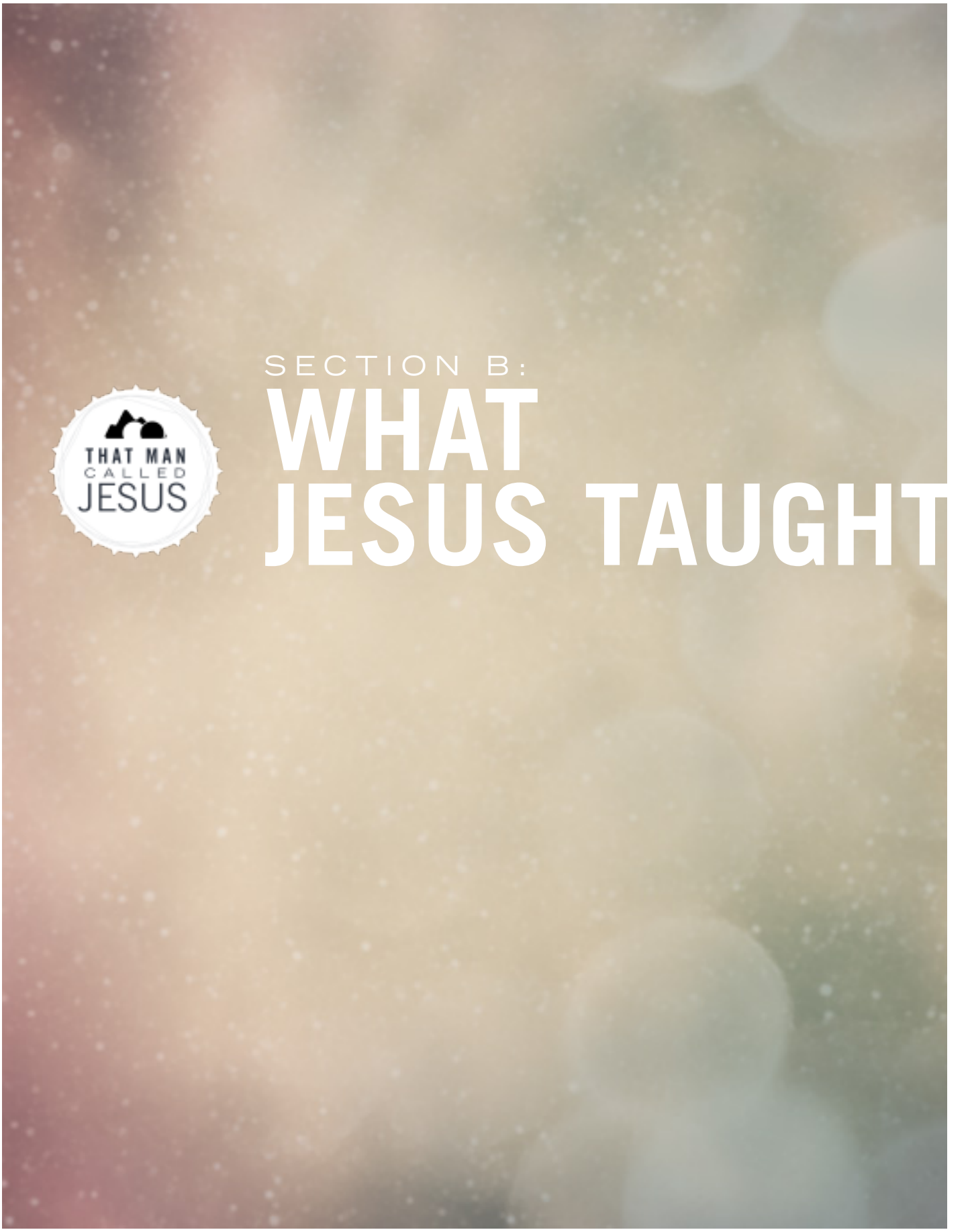
JOHN 18:37 > To Pilate

- *I am a king.*

The Trilemma

Although many claim that Jesus was merely a "good man", one has to ask if that is really an option after studying his life. Renowned thinker and author C.S. Lewis once said that thorough contemplation of Christ's life presents us with a trilemma: the decision of whether or not Christ was the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic. Lewis believed, logically, that these were the only real options.

According to Lewis, either Jesus was God as he said, or he was a deceiver (and not a good man) or a crazy man who didn't know what he was saying. Finish this week's discussion by discussing the trilemma with your group.



SECTION B:

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

Introduction to Week 4

So far we have looked at what Jesus did, what others said about him, and what Jesus said about himself. Now that we have been properly introduced to Jesus, we have a framework from which to evaluate what he taught.

It is important to remind ourselves again that Jesus was no "feel good" guru. He was obviously not interested in tickling people's ears in order to get them to like him. Jesus taught doctrines that he knew would divide people (Luke 12:51-53). Even Jesus' disciples found some of his teachings hard to accept (John 6:60). Our next few meetings will expose Jesus' teachings. Some of his sayings may be confusing to us at first, just as they were for his disciples, but with a little persistence we should see some clear themes emerging.

This week we will focus specifically on man's great problem. Jesus talked a lot about it. As in previous weeks, we will examine what John has recorded on this subject by looking at several isolated statements that he, John the Baptist, and Jesus made. At the end of the discussion we will see if we can summarize into a single sentence what man's problem is according to the Gospel of John. Work together and have fun!

The Apostle John's Teachings

Let's look at **JOHN 1:1-11**.

In these verses, John uses the metaphors of light and darkness. Discuss these concepts in detail, making sure to answer the following questions:

A. Where is mankind situated by default – in the light or darkness?
B. What has the darkness failed to do, according to do (v. 5)?
C. Was John (the Baptist) the light?
D. Who is the true light (v. 9)?
E. To whom does he give light (v. 9)?
F. Though Jesus was in the world and even made the world, what has the world failed to do (v. 10)?
G. What did Jesus' own people (the Jews) fail to do (v. 11)?
H. What right did Jesus give to those who received and believed him (v. 12)?
I. According to verse 12, is everyone a child of God?

NOTE

John the Baptist was related to Jesus through their mothers. In Luke 1:36, Elizabeth is described as Mary's "kinswoman," meaning that they were related in some way through marriage or blood. Elizabeth, being elderly, may have been an aunt, great-aunt, or one of the many types of "cousin." The precise relationship cannot be determined. According to the gospel accounts, John the Baptist anticipated a messianic figure greater than himself and he is commonly referred to as the precursor or forerunner of Jesus, since John announces Jesus' coming.

John the Baptist's Teachings

1. Let's look at **JOHN 1:29-34.**
   A. What did John call Jesus (v. 29)?
   B. According to John, what did Jesus come to do?
   C. So according to John the Baptist, what is the world's problem?

2. In **JOHN 3:36**, John the Baptist makes another bold statement about Jesus. What does he say about those who either believe in him or reject him?

Jesus' Teachings

1. Let's look at **JOHN 3:1-21** where Jesus talks with Nicodemus, a religious leader who comes to see Jesus at night. What insight can be gained about mankind's problem from this passage?
   - *"No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." (v. 3)*

NOTE

John mentions a lot about perishing, death, and condemnation in relation to mankind's condition. It is important to recognize that Jesus is not merely referring to physical death. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says to his disciples, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." In other words, both spiritual and physical death are in view. The concept of hell is not completely clear in the New Testament, but Jesus described it as a place that destroys both body and soul (physical and spiritual). It is the state of existence that remains when one rejects God, who is the source of everything good. It is the total deprivation of all love, goodness and hope.

John also wrote the book of Revelation. In it he records a vision of the type of death Jesus talked about: "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death." (Revelation 20:14) The first death (physical) is separation of the spirit and soul from the body. The second death (spiritual) is the separation of the spirit and soul from God. We see then that the consequences of rejecting Jesus are very serious.

- *The second birth that is required is a spiritual birth, inferring that all people are spiritually dead or dormant.*
- *Believing in Jesus brings eternal life.*
- *Those who do not believe will "perish" (v. 16).*
- *Whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already (v. 18).*
- *We love darkness because our deeds are evil (v. 19).*
- *We avoid coming into the light for fear of having our deeds exposed (v. 20).*

2. Look at **JOHN 8:12-24** where the Pharisees dispute Jesus' testimony about himself – that he is "the light of the world." What insights about mankind's condition can be gleaned from these verses, especially verses 12, 21 and 24?

- *Even religious leaders can be unaware of the truth.*
- *People who don't follow Jesus "walk in darkness."*
- *People who don't believe in him will "die in their sins."*

3. In **JOHN 8:31-36**, Jesus continues to give more information to those whose hearts were open to hearing him. Take note of what Jesus says here about sin and slavery. What insights do you glean here about mankind's condition?

- *"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin." (v. 34)*
- *God's wrath remains on those who reject Jesus (v. 36).*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:
Why is mankind under God's wrath? Why is he angry?

- *It is important to understand that God is both the epitome of love and holiness.*
- *His holiness will not allow him to tolerate sin (any deed, thought or attitude that is contrary to his character).*
- *We must understand that mankind chose to reject God, not vice versa.*
- *God's love has also compelled him to find a way to forgive us and redeem us.*

4. In **JOHN 8:42-47**, Jesus makes some strong statements about his Jewish listeners. What does he say?

- *The devil is their father (v. 44).*
- *They do not belong to God (v. 47).*

5. We've already read the story of the man born blind in John chapter 9. In that passage, Jesus basically says that his Jewish audience was "spiritually deaf" – unable to grasp the truth he was sharing with them about himself. In **JOHN 9:35-41** he uses the parallel concept of "spiritual blindness" to describe the Pharisees. Discuss the concept of spiritual blindness and the difference between the person who acknowledges their blindness and the person who doesn't.

   - *Those who acknowledge their blindness are like the blind man who received his sight.*
   - *Those who refuse to acknowledge their blindness remain guilty before God.*

6. Look at **JOHN 12:42-50.** What can we glean about the human condition in these verses?

   - *The Pharisees liked the praise of people more than the praise of God (v.43).*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:
Do you think most people are more driven by what God thinks or by what people around them think?

   - *We are "in the darkness" (v. 46).*
   - *Jesus didn't come to judge the world, but to "save" it.*
   - *So we can infer that the world is in trouble if it needs to be "saved."*

7. Look at **JOHN 14:1-7** and discuss the following questions.

   A. What place do you think verses 1-4 are talking about?

   B. According to Jesus, are there many ways to heaven?

   C. Can a person get to heaven on their own?

8. Look at **JOHN 15:18-25** and discuss the following questions.

   A. Why do people hate the followers of Jesus?

   B. Why do people have no excuse for their sin (v. 22)?

   C. What other reason contributes to our guilt (v. 24)?

9. Jesus' last recorded prayer before his crucifixion is recorded in John 17. Look at **JOHN 17:24-26** and discuss among yourselves what Jesus' ultimate desire for humankind was.

    - *For us to be where Jesus is.*
    - *For us to see his divine glory.*
    - *For us to know the Father.*
    - *For the Father's love to be in us.*
    - *For Jesus to be in us.*

10. As promised, it's time to summarize mankind's problem as it is presented in the Gospel of John. Working together as a group, formulate one sentence that encapsulates the ideas that you have uncovered.

    - *Concepts include...*
        - *We are sinners.*
        - *We are slaves to sin.*
        - *We are in darkness and spiritually blind.*
        - *We are spiritually dead and in need of spiritual birth.*
        - *Our sin renders us guilty before God.*
        - *Our sin separates us from God.*
        - *Our sin makes us the object of God's wrath and judgment.*
        - *We are unable to reach God on our own.*
        - *We need to be saved.*

11. The Apostle Paul summarized man's great problem in the epistle he wrote to the Christians in Rome:

    "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

    – ROMANS 3:23

    "For the wages of sin is death..."

    – ROMANS 6:23

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Do these statements agree pretty well with the summary that you created?

Introduction to Week 5

As we have seen from our last discussion, man is in serious trouble. He is a sinner, and his sin separates him from God. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) The penalty for his sin is death – both physical and spiritual. "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23) Without a solution he will spend all of eternity separated from God and his goodness.

Thankfully, God has provided a solution to man's predicament. In today's discussion we will identify what that solution is. Once again, we will read some statements by John and then by Jesus. Let's remember that we are dealing with spiritual truths. Sometimes the only way to teach spiritual truth is through images. Fortunately for us, Jesus was the master at communicating spiritual truth; his stories will make sense if we study them through. By now some of the passages are starting to sound familiar to us. This will be helpful, as we can draw on our understanding of the passage at hand. Let's keep the theme, "God's Solution to Man's Problem," in mind as we have our discussion.

NOTE

In the Old Testament times, **a perfect lamb without any defect** was killed and sacrificed (as an innocent substitute) to pay for the sins of the people. This was a symbol of Jesus Christ, the true **Lamb of God**, who was later to come into the world. Why then, did Jesus (the Lamb of God) die on the cross?

1. Look at **JOHN 1:12**. To whom does Jesus give the right to become children of God?

2. Read **JOHN 1:29**.

3. Look over **JOHN 3:1-21**.
   - A. What solution does Jesus give Nicodemus for seeing the kingdom of God (v. 3)?
   - B. To be "born of water" refers to physical birth. In order to enter the kingdom of God, Jesus says we need what other type of birth (v. 5)?
   - C. To what event do you suppose Jesus is referring in verse 14, and why?

     NOTE: *Jesus refers to a story from the Old Testament. At a certain point during Israel's trek to the promised land, the Lord had Moses make a bronze snake and place it upon a pole. He did this so that anyone who suffered a deadly snake bite could look to the pole and be saved from death (see Numbers 21:8). Here Jesus says that he also will be "lifted up."*

   - D. What was God's gift to the world (vv. 16-17)?
   - E. What was God's motive for doing this?
   - F. According to verse 17, why did God send Jesus into the world?
   - G. Is it safe to say, then, that God's gift for the world, is embodied in Jesus?

4. Read **JOHN 4:13-15**.
   - A. What happens to the person who drinks the "water" Jesus gives them?
   - B. How did Jesus describe what it's like to have eternal life inside?

5. Read **JOHN 5:24**.
   A. Based on what Jesus says here, when does eternal life begin?
   B. Discuss how it could be possible to "cross over from death to life" when you are already alive physically.

6. Refresh your memory of **JOHN 6:35-40**.
   A. What will happen to the person who partakes of the true bread of life?
   B. According to verse 37, will Jesus drive away someone who comes to him?
   C. According to verses 39-40, what will Jesus do in the last day for those who believe in him?

7. Read **JOHN 8:12**.

   According to Jesus himself, what will his followers never do again?

8. Read **JOHN 8:34-36**.
   A. What can the Son of Man set you free from?
   B. What does it look like to be freed from sin?

9. Read **JOHN 10:7-10**.
   A. What term does Jesus use for himself?
   B. What will happen to the person who enters through him (see verse 9)?
   C. For what two reasons did Jesus come?
   D. From these last two passages then, what is the nature of the spiritual life that Jesus offers?

10. Look over **JOHN 10:14-18**.
    A. What did Jesus say he would do for his sheep in verses 15, 17, and 18?
    B. What do you think he was talking about?
    C. Do you think Jesus died on the cross out of obligation or out of choice?

NOTE

Writers like the apostle Paul clarify the fact that **Jesus died in our place in order to pay for our wrong deeds**. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

11. Read **JOHN 14:5-7**.

    A. What 3 words does Jesus use to describe himself here (v. 6)?

    B. What is the only way to the Father (v. 6)?

DISCUSSION QUESTION:
How do you feel about Jesus' exclusive sounding statement here? Does he have the authority to say this?

12. Read **JOHN 19:30**.

    What do you suppose Jesus meant by his final words on the cross? What was "finished?"

13. After everything you discussed in this session, how would you summarize "God's solution to mankind's problem?" Take some time to discuss this together and record your thoughts below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

However you summarized God's solution, numerous New Testament writers use the word "gift" to describe it.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

– ROMANS 6:23 (THE APOSTLE PAUL)

It would be nice to think that God's gift of eternal life automatically applies to everyone, but we may not want to make that assumption. Based on what we've already seen, John seems to suggest some kind of faith response is necessary...

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

– JOHN 3:16

If God loved "the world", it's safe to say that his gift of life is offered to everyone. But will everyone receive it? How are we to respond to God's offer? John has made a lot of statements in that regard. Did you catch them? That will be the focus of our final discussion.

Introduction to Week 6

Mankind's problem is sin (Romans 3:23). From what we've read, it is pretty clear that John believed he knew the solution to this problem; his name is Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) John says that because of Christ's death on the cross he can offer us eternal life, entrance into God's family, light upon our life's path, and inner satisfaction. There now remains just one question that begs to be asked. "How does someone respond to this offer?" All of our discussion to this point leads naturally to this very important question.

Indeed, if what Jesus has said about life is true – our entire existence hangs upon this question of how to respond to Jesus and to God. Take your time as you engage in this week's discussion. Be sure to notice key words that describe exactly what Jesus said was the proper response on behalf of mankind. Many people and organizations have their own ideas of how to respond to God, but we are not interested in that. Our goal is to see from a firsthand witness (John) what Jesus said. Once again, at the end of the lesson you will be asked to collaborate and summarize what Jesus has said on this subject, so stay alert!

1. Read **JOHN 1:10-12.**
   A. What is mankind condemned for not doing?
   B. What were Jesus' own people condemned for in verse 11?
   C. To whom has Jesus given the right to become children of God?

2. Read **JOHN 3:16-18**.
   A. What does Jesus say one must do in order to have eternal life?
   B. If one does this, what will happen to him?
   C. If he does not believe, what will happen to him (verses 17 and 18)?
   D. What do you think it means to "stand condemned already"?

3. Read **JOHN 3:36**.
   A. According to this verse, what happens to the person who believes in the Son (Jesus)?
   B. What happens to the person who rejects the Son?

4. Read **JOHN 5:24**.
   A. According to Jesus, what two things must a person do to receive eternal life?
   B. How does a person's standing change upon doing these 2 things?
   C. What do you think is meant here by "death" and "life"?

5. Read **JOHN 6:28-29**.

   Based on these verses, what sole work does God require of us?

6. Read **JOHN 6:35**.

   What 2 actions does Jesus encourage us to take?

7. Read **JOHN 12:36**.

   Discuss together what John says one must do with the light in order to become a child of the light.

8. Review **JOHN 20:24-30** (the story of Thomas).

   A. Why do we often refer to Thomas as "Doubting Thomas"?

   B. Who does Jesus call blessed in verse 29, and to whom do you think he was referring?

9. Read **JOHN 20:31**.

   Why did John write his book?

10. Working together from what you discussed in this session, write down at least 4 terms that you find that Jesus used to describe what our response must be toward him.

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. There are many people in North America who believe that a Christian is someone who simply believes Jesus existed. There are others who feel that all they must do is agree that Jesus was a good man. Jesus seemed to use the word "believe" in its stricter sense. Consider this helpful example:

    A Marxist is not a person who believed Karl Marx existed; it is a person who embraces the philosophies of Marx. A Darwinist is one who embraces the teachings of Darwin. Likewise, a Christian is one who embraces the teachings of Jesus Christ.

We have now had a number of weeks to contemplate what John has recorded about Jesus and his message. We have discussed his life in some detail, seeing what he did, what others said about him, and what he said about himself. We have also examined Jesus' teachings. We learned, first of all, that mankind has a serious problem. That problem is sin. Sin has separated us from God, and threatens to separate us from his presence for all eternity. God's solution to man's problem was to send Jesus to earth.

By dying in our place, Jesus created a way for us to be reunited with God and to enjoy eternal life. Eternal life begins the moment that a person believes in Jesus. We have seen that "believing" is more than just giving intellectual assent to the fact that Jesus existed. Jesus has presented us with a whole different way of living, one that we must embrace or reject. Just as Jesus was committed to doing the will of the Father (John 6:38), we must choose whether we are going to continue to rule our own lives or let God be our true Father – accepting his identity, love, protection and provision, but also submitting to his authority and rules.

Becoming a Child of God

Imagine for a second that you are an orphan, not old enough to make it on your own, but old enough to decide of you want to become part of a family. The parents of the family meet with you, and you start to spend some time with them and their children. After a number of months, the father asks you if you would like to become part of their family. He is willing to adopt you, but the decision is yours to make.

Discuss together with the group some of the things you would need to process before making your decision...

A. What does it mean to take on someone else's identity?
B. What are the benefits of being adopted?
C. Is it normal to expect to submit to the parents' authority and to abide by the family rules?
D. What might make an orphan say yes to the offer?
E. What might make an orphan say no to the offer?

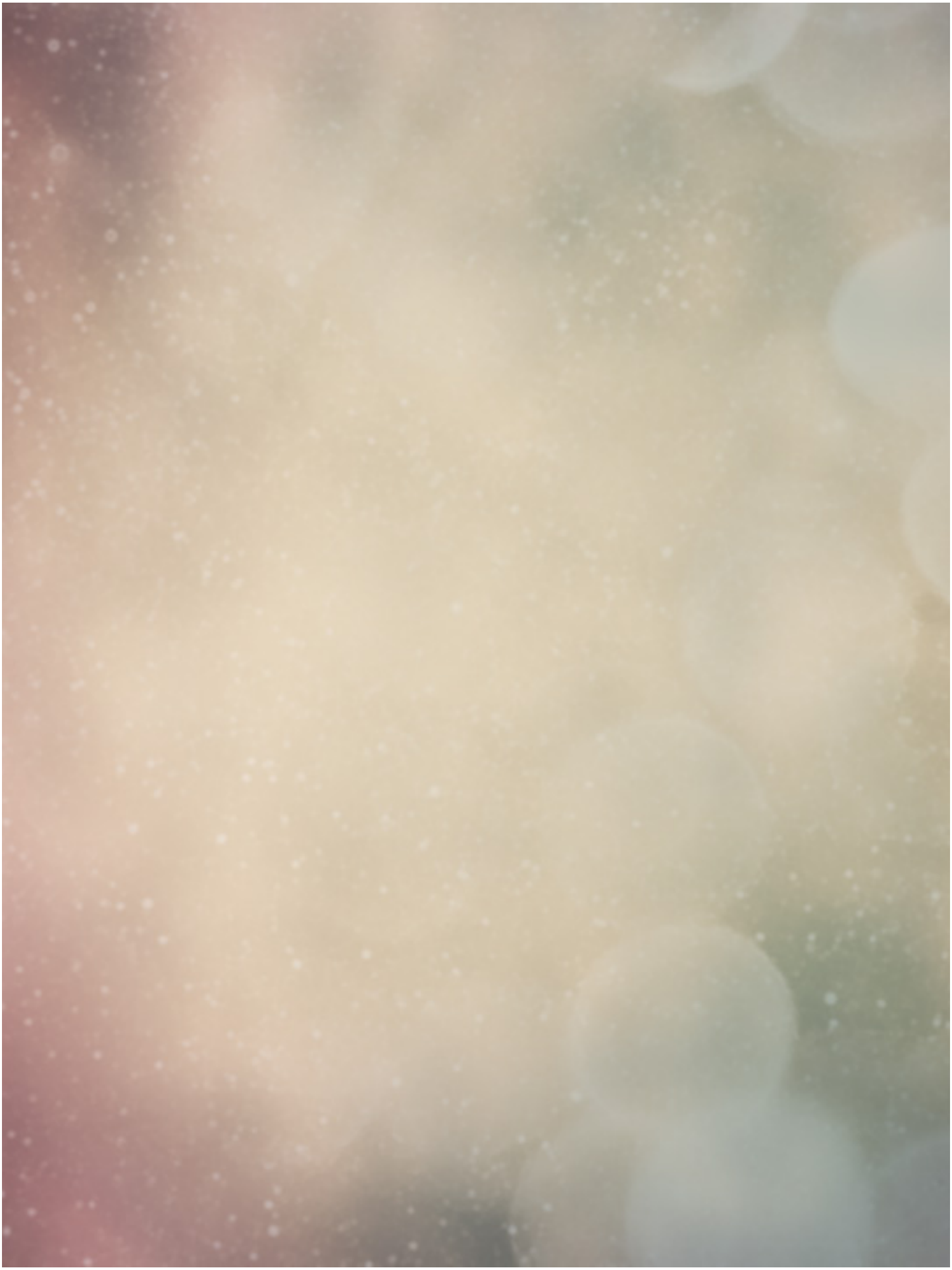
As you can see, there is a lot to consider. The same is true of someone who is choosing to become a member of God's family. And this seems to be exactly what John is talking about in a spiritual sense...

> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.
> **– JOHN 1:12-13**

Two Final Discussion Questions

We appreciate everyone's input throughout this book club, and each person's willingness to share their personal thoughts and feelings. These last two questions are very personal, but hopefully by now you feel comfortable enough with the group to be honest about how you feel.

1. Do you consider yourself a child of God in the way the Apostle John describes? Why or why not?
2. If you wouldn't consider yourself a child of God (in the way John describes), what would you say keeps you from "receiving Jesus" and accepting God's offer to become your true Father?

Conclusion

Thanks again for being part of this book club. It has been a great experience! We hope that you have benefited a lot from hearing John's firsthand perspective about Jesus. Please be sure to talk with your book club facilitator if you have anything further you'd like to discuss or if you'd like to inquire about future book club opportunities.