

John 1-4

studies for dpc growth groups

There's an introduction to John's Gospel on the back cover...

John 1:1-18

God on earth!

The aim of this study

To see that, as promised, God has made Himself known in the divine person of His Son, with the express purpose of calling together His children.

Read John 1:1-4

- Have a go at filling out a CV for the character introduced by John: name, date of birth, title, address, previous work experience, strengths... and any other headings you can think of.
- Christians sometimes call Jesus their 'friend'. How does such a statement fit alongside these verses?
- How do these verses alone change the way *you* think about Jesus?

Read John 1:5-13

- What (or who) is the main subject of these verses?
- What different things do these verses tell us about what God has done?
- How do these verses change the way you think about:
 - God?
 - Men and women?
- Why do you think John included this paragraph in the introduction to his Gospel? (Keep in mind his aim for writing.)

Read John 1:14-18

- Brainstorm as many ways as you can that verses 14-17 show Jesus Christ achieving what the Old Testament pointed towards.
- Why do you think John included verse 14-17 in his Prologue?
- Reflect back over the whole passage (John 1:1-18).
 - How does the Prologue serve John's aim in 20:31?
 - What does today's passage tell us about what kind of God we have? How then should we respond to Him?

Thinking it through

- The subject of these first eighteen verses is clearly Jesus. But what have these verses taught us about God the Father? How might this affect the way we relate to Him?
- There are at least seven negatives in the first eighteen verses (see if you can find them). How do they help us in our understanding both of ourselves and of our apathetic or anti-Christian friends? What implications does this passage have for our evangelism?
- The aim of John's Gospel is that we 'might believe that Jesus is the Christ and so have life in His name.' How has this passage helped you in this way?
- What single most important thing have you learned in today's study? How will it affect you this year?

John 1:1-51

'We have found the Messiah!'

The aim of this study

That we should acknowledge the coming of God to His world, as He promised He would do, and understand His purpose of opening the way to heaven through the sacrifice of His Son. We will then be eager to see what 'greater things' about Jesus will be shown in the rest of the book.

Read John 1:1-51

- From the passage, who is Jesus described as? What do each of these descriptions mean, and if appropriate what Old Testament passages help us understand each description? (Write your answers in the table.)
- Unlike the disciples, we have the benefit of hindsight. From what you know of Jesus and his life, are these descriptions of him justified? (Find New Testament references and write them in the table.)
- If the descriptions of Jesus in this passage are all true, how then does each description of him affect the way you should relate to him? (Write your answers in the table.)

[illegible]

John 2:1-25

'God's king is here. Glory! Judgment!'

Orientation

Remember John's purpose statement:

"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 (NIV)

The first two 'signs' are found in this next section. It's bookended by 2:1-11 and 4:43-54. As we read this section we should be on the lookout for the major themes that will be introduced by the first 'sign' and summed up by the second.

The aim of this study

To see that in Jesus, God's promised messianic age really has come. It is a time of glory, but also of judgment and challenge. How do we respond?

To start...

- What were the different titles given to Jesus in chapter 1? What has John been telling us about who Jesus is and what he came to do?

Read John 2:1-11

- What impact does this first sign have on Jesus' disciples? And why? (Amos 9:13-15 helps to explain the disciples' reaction.)
- As the Gospel unfolds, it soon becomes very clear that the messianic age has not yet come in the wonderful way promised by the prophets. How does verse 4 help to explain this? (It may be useful to look up 5:28.)
- How does the first sign throw light on the lessons we learned in chapter 1?

Read John 2:12-25

- This passage records two major events in Jesus' ministry. What are they?
- Why do you think John records the temple cleansing here? What themes does it pick up from chapter 1? And how does it tie in with 2:1-11?
- The Jews demand a sign to show that Jesus has authentic authority to cleanse their temple. How does Jesus' answer authenticate His action?
- What do verses 12-25 tell us about Jesus' place and function in the messianic age? How does the disciples' response in verse 1-22 differ from the response recorded in verses 23-25? What does this tell us about a genuine response to Jesus the Messiah?

Thinking it through

- Imagine that you have a Christian friend whose primary reason for following Jesus appears to be the expectation that He will provide personal fulfilment for his/her life, that He brings answers to prayers for personal safety, health and happiness, and that He gives people a sense of belonging and worth. In what ways would you want this passage to expand and challenge your friend's understanding of who Jesus is and what He has really come to do?
- Today's passage tells us a lot about genuine 'worship' and genuine 'faith' now that the Messiah has come. How do these lessons challenge and unsettle our views of what worship and faith are all about?

John 3:1-36

Entry into the kingdom of God

The aim of this study

The key question in today's passage is: How does a person enter into God's eternal kingdom?

The aim of this study is to see that Jesus is the gateway to heaven. Entry into God's eternal kingdom is possible only on the basis of faith in Jesus, who will deal with the problem of sin.

To start...

- If you were to conduct a survey, what are some of the different answers you think might be given to this question: 'Why do you think people won't accept Jesus' message today?'

Read John 2:23 to 3:15

- How does 3:1-3 begin to address the question raised by 2:23-25?
- Look up Ezekiel 36:24-29. What do these verses tell us about humanity's natural condition? What does God promise to do in order to create a special people belonging to Himself? How does this verse in Ezekiel help to explain Jesus' response to Nicodemus in John 3:4-8?
- Jesus explains to Nicodemus that certain things need to happen before anyone may enter into the kingdom. What are these things and how do they come about? (Record your answers on a piece of paper with two columns, for 'God's action' and 'Humanity's response'.)

Read John 3:16-21

- What do these verses tell us about: God? Jesus? Believers? Unbelievers?
- How might these verses change the answers to the survey question we discussed earlier?

Read John 3:22-36

- The incident recorded in verses 22-30 is an odd one for John to include. What do you think he achieves by putting it in his Gospel? (How does your answer tie in with 1:6-8?)
- The teaching of verses 1-21 can be hard to accept. According to verses 31-36, why should we accept it?

Thinking it through

- Is there anything in today's passage that you find offensive or hard to accept?
- The lessons we have been learning in this passage may be deeply offensive to religious people, who think that they can make their own way to God. What things in particular might cause offence?
- What have you learned (or be reminded of) about: (Go round the group)
 - God?
 - Jesus?
 - Yourself?
 - Your friends (especially those who claim to be agnostics, atheists etc.)?

John 4:1-54

The Saviour of the world!

The aim of this study

To realise that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the worlds who brings spiritual life to all, Gentiles as well as Jews. We should respond to Him appropriately by believing His words and coming to Him as our Saviour and Lord.

Read John 4:1-26

- After meeting with Nicodemus in chapter 3, Jesus now meets a Samaritan woman.
 - What are the similarities between the two encounters? (What are the main issues?)
 - What are the most striking differences between the two?
 - What point might John be making by placing one encounter after the other?
- According to these verses, what does God seek? And what does He give? How are God's purposes fulfilled in Jesus?
- What do these verses teach us about eternal life?
- Read Ezekiel 37:20-23. In the light of this promise in Ezekiel, what do you think is the main point of John 1:1-26?

Read John 4:27-42

- What are the disciples surprised about?
- How do verses 31-38 challenge and change the disciples' understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to do?

- In what ways do the woman and the villagers show that they have understood what Jesus was talking about in verses 1-26?

Read John 4:43-54

- These verses end the section that began with the first sign in 2:1-11. From this section, how might you summarise:
 - Who Jesus is?
 - What He came to do?
 - Who will gain entry into His kingdom?

Thinking it through

- From the whole of today's passage, what would you say is the correct response to Jesus?
- Why do you think John included this chapter, with its focus on Samaritans, at this stage of his book?
- What do we learn from the Samaritan woman's misunderstanding about Jesus and also from her correct response to him?

Introducing John's Gospel

John's aim (& ours)

Almost at the end of his account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, John presents his readers with his aim:

"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 (NIV)

Everything that John has recorded contributes to his purpose, that of convincing his readers about the identity of Jesus Christ, and about the necessity of a right response to Him in order to have life. As we read the Gospel, therefore, it is important to keep asking three main questions:

1. How does this passage enable us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
2. What does it mean to 'have life' in His name?
3. What does a right response to belief in Him look like?

Each passage should be approached in this manner, with questions such as the following: What does this teach about Christ? What sort of 'Christ' is He? What does it mean to have life? What is a genuine and right response to this Christ?

A suggested starting point

The best way to get started in John's Gospel is to read it! Set aside some time when you can read the whole book in one sitting. Read fairly rapidly, trying to get a feel for the book as a whole: the main themes; the structure; the language. The point of this exercise is to take in the big picture, so don't worry about understanding all the details at this stage. At the end, note down your first impressions. If you struggle to make mental notes, jot down a few very brief comments with references as you read, but don't lose your momentum!