

C L O S E
ENCOUNTERS

Coming Face to Face with the Man Named Jesus

A Digging Deeper Bible Study
in the Gospel of John

Bethany Cooper

Todd Stiles

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*For Bethany
‡
In Dedication and
Loving Memory*

She was an 11th grader, and I was the new youth pastor. But it only took one encounter for me to notice there was something special about Bethany Cooper's love for Jesus Christ.

We were chatting just outside my office one Sunday, as I remember it. People were passing non-chalantly, and she was asking the typical "I-wonder-what-the-new-guy-is-like" kind of questions. But all that changed the minute the word "discipleship" was voiced. Suddenly, Bethany became intense, excited, eager to know my thoughts. She leaned over, asked specific questions, then told me of her deep desire for others to come to Christ and grow in Him. *"Most youth groups never really take that command seriously, and I think that's tragic!"* she proclaimed.

Bethany became our first student discipler at Grace Church, meeting weekly with Jr. High girls who were new to the faith and helping them understand the Bible and God better. And this didn't take her months to "pray about." Within weeks she was on-mission, confident God could use her to disciple other students now, not just later.

Bethany graduated from North High, went off to college, spent a semester in England, and, after earning her degree, eventually found her way back to Des Moines, where she again got involved in church and ministry. It was during this time that we reconnected, and Bethany agreed to write a Bible study for YLC. We settled on John, and she went right to work, eventually completing this project and handing it over to me for editing and formatting.

But all had not been well for months. There were days of confusion and fear for Bethany, and times of great paranoia would overwhelm her. After multiple medical exams, the inevitable diagnosis was determined: Bethany had a brain tumor.

For the next 18 months Bethany lived courageously, meeting every day optimistically and with great hope. There were times we thought the tumor had shrunk; other times we thought it could be treated with medication on a long-term basis. But in the end, this inoperable brain tumor weaved its way around her brain and brought her young, heroic life to an end. On October 20, 2003, at 6:08 in the morning, Bethany Cooper finally left that body of pain and torture and went home to be with Jesus in Heaven, where she would no longer be ravaged by cancer. She was finally free...finally home!

It is in celebration of Bethany Cooper's life of discipleship that I dedicate this Digging Deeper Bible Study, *"Close Encounters."* Written by her in the last two years of her life, *"Close Encounters"* is Bethany's effort to pass on her love for spiritual growth and Bible study in written form, enabling her ministry and impact to continue long after she has left this earth. Truly, though she is no longer here with us, Bethany continues to speak through the pages of the work you now hold in your hands.

And in the event Bethany is catching glimpses of our feeble efforts here, let me whisper this grateful prayer, *"Thank you, Bethany, for your life and love for the Lord! We'll see you north of the sky!"*

Todd Stiles
President and Founder, YLC

C L O S E **Table of Contents** E N C O U N T E R S

In the Beginning	5
Can I Get A Witness?	9
Just Tell One	12
A Wedding, Water, and Wine	16
The Right Way to Be Angry	19
What Does it Mean to Believe?	22
A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Well	25
Seeing or Believing?	29
Missing the Forest Because of the Trees	32
Look Who Came for Dinner	35
Some People Just Don't Get It	38
The Good? The Bad? The Christ?	42
Starting Over	45
The Blind Man and the Blind Men	48

C L O S E ENCOUNTERS

Coming Face to Face with the Man Named Jesus

Imagine meeting Jesus up close and personal. It would be an encounter that would change your life forever. Or at least it should be!

That's exactly what happened in the pages of the Gospel of John. Person after person came face to face with the God-Man Jesus Christ, and for many, it was a revolutionary experience. By simply believing, crippled people became runners, blind men gained sight, prostitutes pursued purity and fisherman turned in their nets for a life of preaching on the road. That's some deep transformation, eh?

Why not all? Good question! Believing is more than seeing, and, sadly, some who encountered Jesus weren't ready to put their faith in the invisible; trusting the unknown was something in which they had no interest. I can hear them now, can't you? — *"If I can't understand it, I don't want any part of it."* Unfortunately, they got their wish.

But what about you? Could your life be changed by an encounter with the Son of God? You bet! And that's the purpose of "**Close Encounters**" — to get you in touch with Jesus, God's only Son, so that your belief in Him will not only begin, but build. Our desire is that your faith in Christ increase as you see and understand exactly how He brought change into the lives of so many people.

So get your Bible, grab a pen, and get ready to dig in to a hands-on study through John's perspective on the life of Jesus. You'll meet people you never knew and see how God radically changed each person who simply believed He was who He said He was and could do what He said He could do. Who knows — the next person He changes could be you!

In The Beginning...

Focus Passage

John 1:1-18

John, the fourth biographer of Jesus' life, left no doubt from the very outset as to who Jesus was. In fact, he uses various terms to describe Jesus to us in order to help us get a clearer picture of God's Son. After all, the better we know Jesus, the better we'll know God.

Study Questions

1. John begins his account of Jesus' life in a very different way than the other biographers of Jesus. Write the first verse of the first chapter from each of the following gospels:

Matthew:

Mark:

Luke:

John:

2. Of the above, which is your favorite? Why?

3. What — or *who* — was the very first Word ever?

4. John keeps saying, "Him," "Him," "Him." Who is this "Him"?

5. Who is the “Light”?

Who — or *what* — is the “darkness”?

6. There are two Johns here: The writer of this book and John the Baptist.

- Who sent John the Baptist?

- Why was he sent?

7. John the Baptist testifies about Jesus in 1:15. What did he testify?

8. Who did not know Him or receive Him? Speculate on why you think this happened.

9. When you receive Him and believe in His name, what do you become?

What does that mean?

10. According to 1:14, what became flesh? Why?

11. When is the first time Jesus' name is mentioned in this book?

12. Who was full of grace and truth and how do we realize it?

13. Who has seen God and what does this tell you about the relationship between God and Jesus?

14. Who is "begotten of God"?

15. Who explains God to us?

Consider This

Because Jesus came to earth and lived life among us, no one can ever say, "*I don't know what God is like.*" On the contrary – Jesus brought God near, and through faith all of us can become as close as a son or daughter.

Can I Get A Witness?

Focus Passage

John 1:19-34

In order for anyone to be convicted of a crime, there must be hard evidence that leaves little doubt. In other words, *proof* is needed. And the best proof in any court of law is an eye-witness. Knowing man's innate desire for proof, God sent a divine eye-witness, a messenger with positive proof named John the Baptist.

Study Questions

1. Each of the biographers of Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)—also called Gospel writers—included John the Baptist's life and testimony in their books. Take time now to skim what each had to say about John the Baptist and sum it up here:

Matthew (Matthew 3:1-17):

Mark (Mark 1:1-11):

Luke (Luke 3:1-22):

John (John 1:1-34):

2. In the book of John, who came looking for John the Baptist?

Did these questioners come voluntarily? Explain.

3. The questioners seemed to be looking for someone in particular. Who?

What is the significance of the people the questioners were looking for?

4. What did John the Baptist call himself?

Were the questioners satisfied with that answer?

5. Where was John when Jesus showed up and what was he doing?

Who sent John to do this?

6. When John saw Jesus coming toward him, what did he call Him?

What does this person do?

7. How did John know what Jesus was?

8. What exactly was John's testimony?

9. The questioners come and asked John the Baptist about being the Christ. Then, the next day Christ shows up. Speculate what would have happened if the questioners would have stuck around the next day.

10. Why do you think God had it happen the way it did?

11. In these verses, there are three types of people: the priests and Levites who are searching for the Christ (seekers); the people who are just coming to be baptized (believers); and John the Baptist who knows who Jesus is (followers). Which category do you feel best represents your life right now? Why?

12. Of the above three types, which is the highest level?

13. If you're not at that level, what would it take to get you there?

Consider This

Though he got a lot of attention, John continually pointed to Jesus. He knew it was all about God's Son, not about him. As a spiritual detour sign, John knew he needed to be routing people to the real attraction — Jesus Christ. Do you take that role in your life seriously? Are you a pointer or a problem? Start pointing today and be the witness to which others can look to get a clear picture of what God is really like.

Just Tell One

Focus Passage

John 1:35-51

Ask any successful businessperson about their most valuable marketing technique and they *won't* start hailing the virtues of the yellow pages. Why? Because printed ads are never as good as a personal, verbal testimony. In fact, the oldest and best way to spread good news is by word of mouth. Every time a customer refers a friend to their business of choice, he or she is putting a lot of confidence in that business. Nobody wants to get a reputation as someone with bad taste!

In the same way, John the Baptist referred a couple of his friends to Christ. John's faith in Jesus not only changed those two men's lives, but it was the first step toward building an important group of witnesses and friends.

Study Questions

1. The first words in this passage are "the next day." Next after what?
2. John repeats his declaration that Jesus is the Lamb of God, which he originally stated in 1:29. What happened this time that didn't happen the first time?
3. What is Jesus' reaction to this happening?
4. What is Jesus called here?

In your opinion, why didn't they call Him "Lamb of God" like John the Baptist did?

5. These two men were obviously curious about Jesus and wanted to spend time with Him to find out who He was. What relationship does *time* have to do with *how well* we know someone?

How much time are you spending with God to find out who He is?

6. Look back over verses 35-42 carefully. Who is missing?

7. In 1:40 Andrew tells someone about Jesus. Who is that person?

What does he tell him?

Why would he do that?

Why would you want to tell someone about Jesus?

Write the name of the last person you witnessed to in the blank below, then offer a prayer on their behalf asking God to send you their way once again.

“The most recent person I witnessed to was _____.”

Unfortunately, not everyone who starts to follow Jesus will continue. Have you ever known anyone to stop following Jesus? Who?

If you have, take a moment to pray for them to commit to following Him once and for all.

8. What does “Messiah” or “Christ” mean?

9. In 1:43–45, Jesus is hanging out with his friends and decides to take a road trip. And like all good road trips, He invites someone else to come along. Who is invited and what does He do?

10. A pattern is emerging here: People notice Jesus, realize who He is, and start talking about Him to others. Among your friends, do you talk about Jesus? Why or why not?

11. Does anyone in these verses join the group without an invitation?

What significance does this have to you about *personally inviting others* to believe in Jesus?

Who have you invited lately?

12. Nathanael has an interesting reaction to his invitation. What was it and why do you think he made those comments?

13. In today's society, Nathanael's attitude could easily be taken as racism. In light of this...

...do you think racism sometimes affects people's witness? How?

...how do you think Jesus views people of various races and skin color?

14. What does Jesus say about Nathanael and what is Nathanael's reaction to that?

15. Jesus makes Nathanael a promise. What is it?

What promises has Jesus made to you, even when we sometimes display attitudes that are incorrect?

16. Three of these people were invited to meet Jesus through friends. Jesus himself invited one. What does this tell you about the way God brings people to Himself?

Consider This

Think back to the person who told you about Christ. Maybe it was your mom or dad, perhaps a pastor, maybe even your youth leader leading this Bible study. While you are no doubt glad someone told you, think how much better it is to pass on the news?! So go ahead, give a Gospel "shout out" to someone...at least tell one more!

A Wedding, Water, and Wine

Focus Passage

John 2:1-12

Hold on. Here comes the first miracle! Wow, is it a good one! In this inaugural miracle He provided His first evidence of His divine connection. Particularly, it was the first opportunity to reveal His “glory” to His new friends and disciples — Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael — so they would believe once and for all. What a way to begin a friendship — watching Jesus rescue a wedding from near disaster.

Study Questions

1. When does this miracle take place? (Hint: count carefully.)
2. Where did Jesus and His disciples have to travel from in order to get to the wedding?
3. What do we know about the bride and groom?
4. How many characters are in this short story?
5. Who has a need in this passage?

What is it?

6. How exactly does Jesus meet the need?

Does He do it in an expected way?

Speculate on other ways He could have met this need:

7. Who is the only person at the wedding who already knew what Jesus was capable of doing?

How do you think she knew that Jesus could help?

8. The conversation between Jesus and his mother is odd, at least from our society's perspective. Jesus sounds doubtful, almost disrespectful. Is he?

If not, what is He really saying to his mom?

What was He waiting for?

9. As Mary's son, Jesus no doubt had to obey his earthly mother. But as God's Son, Jesus had to obey His heavenly Father. Do you think these two responsibilities were about to conflict?

10. What did the headwaiter do? Why?

11. Though we are not given the reaction of the servants, how do you think they responded when told to fill the pits with *water*? In light of the situation...

...do you think this was a hard command to obey? Why?

...how does our obedience connect and relate to God's actions?

...do you think we have to understand to obey?

11. Who knew what really happened?

If you were one of the servants, which would be your reaction:

- Keep quiet about what you've just witnessed
- Drink the new wine first
- Ask for a "To Go" water jug
- Tell others

Why would this have been your reaction?

12. What is Jesus trying to tell His disciples through His actions at the wedding?

(Hint: Consider the words "glory" and "believe" as you think through this question.)
Does He succeed?

Consider This

What areas of your life seem to be near disaster? Is there one area that could really use a "miracle" right now? What is holding back the work of God in this area? Remember — faith ignites God and brings the miracles we need. But it means we have to obey even when it doesn't make sense and when we don't understand.

The Right Way to Be Angry

Focus Passage

John 2:13-25

Rarely does it pay to get upset. In fact, most of us have bad memories of times when people lost their tempers. Yet, there are times when a little anger can bring a lot of justice. Now it must be biblical anger. Biblical anger? That's right — there's a right way to be angry, and Jesus shows us how when He encounters greedy profiteers in the house of his Father. As He asserted His authority, he no doubt upset more than just a few apple carts.

Study Questions

1. What is the occasion for Jesus going into Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel?
2. Jesus gets pretty physical in verses 2:15–16. List the things He does:
3. Who or what is the object of Jesus' wrath?
4. What is His explanation for having done what He did?

Some background information for you...

In Jesus' day, the Jews had the one and only Temple, which was in Jerusalem. This was the Jews' "church." In addition to the Temple, they also had synagogues in their towns, which they went to during the week to worship and fellowship. At different times in the year, all Jews were required to go to Jerusalem and make different kinds of sacrifices at the Temple for the removal of their sins.

Because some of the Jews had to travel a considerable distance to get to the Temple to make these sacrifices—many times involving animals—lots of the traveling Jews simply opted to buy an animal to sacrifice once they got to the Temple. Think about it — the sacrificial animals had to be absolutely perfect with no defect in form or even color. Since a long journey might hurt the animal and render it useless for the sacrifice, why take the chance; just pick one up at the "take-out" window in the Jerusalem Temple.

However, this turned into an abusive situation. For instance, often a sincere Jew would bring a perfect animal, but the Temple priest would reject it for an “imagined” flaw. Surprised and shocked, the worshipping Jew is now in a dilemma: no sacrifice to offer. Oh, but don’t worry...look what we have here in the Temple today — a special on lambs! What do you know! A convenient opportunity to make a dollar!

But that’s not all. Because the priests were often “teamed up” with the sellers, each one got a cut of the profits. And what happened to the rejected animals? Believe it or not, since they really weren’t flawed, they were sold to the next gullible tourist who found himself without an acceptable sacrifice. What a deceitful racket!

There’s more — In order to buy the necessary animals at the Temple, the visiting Jews needed the correct currency. That’s where the moneychangers got in on the profits. And because they could charge exorbitant rates for exchanging money, they, too, were getting filthy rich from a devilish scheme.

5. In light of the background information...

...do you think Jesus was right in His display of anger? Why?

...are there some guidelines you can draw from this passage that would help you know how to be angry in the right way?

6. Does Jesus express concern over any of the other activities that take place in the Temple?

7. What is the gist of the Jews’ question in 2:18?

8. Does Jesus answer the Jews’ question (see 2:19)?

9. The Jews and Jesus are on two different wavelengths regarding the term “temple.” What do the Jews mean by the word?

What does Jesus mean by the word?

10. In the Old Testament, God lived in the Temple. However, Jesus is introducing a new concept here, one that shocked those in the Temple that day. What do you think it is? [for further help, see I Corinthians 6)

11. Like most moments of anger, the act only takes a few minutes, but the discussion that follows lasts a long time. How do we know this?

How long do the disciples talk about this day?

11. John 2:23 starts to move our perspective beyond Jesus’ followers and onto the masses of people who were responding to Him. Were people responding to Jesus’ *message* or His *miracles*?

12. After reading 2:24...
...why do you think Jesus didn’t entrust (or “*reveal himself fully*”) to those followers?

...what was it that he was not willing to reveal fully?

Consider This

Greed and selfishness are never commendable, and standing up for truth and honesty is the responsibility of all Christians. When God’s treasured values are cheapened by man’s attempt to get rich, it is time to take a stand. Let’s just make sure we’re standing up for the right thing in the right way.

What Does It Mean to Believe?

Focus Passage

John 3:1-21

Knowing about God is one thing; *believing in God* is quite another. And Nicodemus found himself in just such a pickle – did he only know things about God, or did he really believe in God and His Son, Jesus? Since he was curious, Nicodemus went straight to the source – Jesus himself! And what he discovered will help us all better understand what it means to believe.

Study Questions

1. According to 3:1 who and what was Nicodemus?

List his credentials, as well as a description of what those titles mean. (You may want to use a dictionary briefly.)

2. Why do you think Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night?

3. According to 3:2, what things did Nicodemus *know* about Jesus?

4. Nicodemus calls Jesus “Rabbi.” What does this mean (dictionary again)?

Does Jesus acknowledge what Nicodemus calls Him?

5. Nicodemus seems impressed with Jesus’ “signs.” What might he be talking about? For possible help, see John 2:1-12.

6. Jesus wants to move Nicodemus from the concept of knowing to the concept of believing, and so He describes it in different words. List the other words Jesus uses to relate this concept in 3:7-8.
7. Re-read 3:4-15, then answer the following questions.
- What did Nicodemus understand?

 - What did Nicodemus *not* understand?

 - Have you ever struggled with understanding what God was saying about a particular issue? If so, briefly describe it.
8. What do you think of Jesus' attitude in 3:10?
9. John 3:15 talks about Jesus being lifted up, just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, a reference to an Old Testament story. Read this story in Numbers 21:4-9 then read John 3:15 again with new insight and write your thoughts about the following questions.
- What was Jesus "lifted up" on?

 - How do we "look to Him" today?

 - What "snake bite" are we saved from?
10. According to 3:16, what does it take for someone to avoid perishing?
11. According to 3:17, what does someone have to do to remain under God's "condemnation"?

12. Together, 3:16 and 3:17 form a major contrast. Describe that contrast in your own words, then list what one action makes the difference between the two opposite outcomes.

12. Based on what you've studied in this chapter, write a simple definition of the word *believe*. Make sure you include *how* someone believes, in *what/whom* they should believe, and the *reasons why* they should believe.

13. Look up the word "believe" in a Bible concordance, and jot down five other references in John that contain the word "believe." Read each of these verses (and perhaps the story surrounding the verse) and see if they give you any further insight in to the concept of believing and what it means.

Consider This

Perhaps you find yourself somewhat like Nicodemus: curious and inquisitive, but still doubtful. Ask yourself this question – have you truly *believed* in God, or do you only *know* things about God? The difference may seem small now, but it won't later. After all, it is the act of believing that makes the greatest difference of all.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Well

Focus Passage

John 4:1-30

Often during the routine habits of life very important things happen. For instance, you're simply eating dinner and you get an unexpected phone call with great news! Or you're just going to class like usual, but guess who you bump into this time – you got it, Mr. Right! For a woman in Samaria, it was just another day of filling her water pots. But it would end up as the single most important encounter in her life.

Study Questions

1. Let's involve ourselves in a little geography. You'll need a map of New Testament times (there is one in the back of most Bibles). According to 4:3, Jesus is leaving what city?

And he is going to what destination?

What town is he going to pass through?

On your map, draw a line connecting all the locations, then ask yourself, 'Why do you think he took this route?'

2. Women usually went to the community well early in the morning to draw all the water they would need for the day. But not this woman. What time of day does this happen? (Check your Bible's footnotes for help on the time, or simply begin counting up from 6:00 AM, the start of the Jewish day.)

Speculate on why this woman would be at the well at this time of day.

3. 4:9 gives one reason the woman was surprised that Jesus would talk to her. What is that reason?

Note: More background for the woman's statement is found in 4:20, where we see that the Samaritans had constructed an alternative place of worship. They Jews were highly offended at this, so their hatred stemmed not just from racial differences but also from religious division.

5. What does Jesus ask for in 4:7?

Does He ever get it?

Why do you think He began this conversation with a woman He knew wasn't "allowed" to talk with Him?

6. Jesus is speaking of heavenly things in 4:10, but the woman is still thinking about earthly water. In 4:11, what two human requirements does she say He is lacking in order to get water?

Now relate this to the next verse by describing, in one word, the attitude she displays in 4:12.

7. List the different words and phrases Jesus uses to describe salvation in 4:13. Which of the words or phrases stands out to you and why?

8. Jesus is patient with this woman as she struggles to understand his message. Something happens in 4:16-19 that helps her finally “break through and get it.”

- What happens that is so astonishing to her?

- Why do you think this amazed her?

- How do you think she felt about Jesus knowing her background?

- Why do you think this began to change her mind about who Jesus was?

9. What issue in 4:20 was puzzling the Samaritan woman?

Why do you think this mattered to her, and why was Jesus’ opinion suddenly so important?

Do you think this issue could have detracted her from the real and more important matter? Explain why and how.

10. In 4:23, how does Jesus settle the matter for her?

10. The woman has yet another religious “diversion” in 4:25 – not having all the answers! She asserts that one day her Messiah will explain it all, after which Jesus makes His startling and climactic statement (4:26). What was that statement?

11. Read 4:28 and list the things the woman did in response to Jesus’ assertion in 4:26.

12. Is the woman's reaction more like the reaction of John the Baptist or that of Nicodemus? Explain.

13. 4:39 gives great insight into the rippling effects of this one encounter Jesus had at the well. What are the amazing results that occurred?

14. According to 4:42, what did the town's residents realize about Jesus?

Explain how this encounter fits into the overall mission of Jesus?

15. Several key values and life skills emerge from this chapter, such as...

- ... Reaching out to people who are different.
- ... Using everyday objects to turn people's attention toward spiritual issues.
- ... Refusing to get bogged down by minor issues so that others will stay focused on the important things.
- ... Giving people a second chance.
- ... Telling our own story (i.e., testimony) as a great way to ignite the interest of others.

Write two or three short sentences explaining what you learned from John 4 about each of these, then pick the one that meant the most and share it with a friend today.

Consider This

What started out as a simple conversation around the water cooler (okay, it was a well) turned out to be a dramatic event for one woman and a whole town. Here's a tip: Go into today with high hopes and great expectations that God will use you in a way that could make a lasting difference in someone's life. You may be simply heading to practice or going to work. Mowing the lawn or getting gas. What may merely be a daily habit to you could end up being the highlight of someone else's life. Be ready and willing to let God use *ordinary* you in an *extraordinary* way!

Seeing or Believing?

Focus Passage

John 4:46-54

Admit it – There's something in human nature that makes us more apt to trust what we can see instead of what we can't see. We tend to believe what is visible, as opposed to what is invisible. Yet, the essence of faith is believing even when we can't see all the facts up front (Hebrews 11). Jesus addressed this issue head on when He spoke to a royal official whose son was ill.

Study Questions

1. In this latter part of John 4 we find Jesus in what city?

When was He here before, and what happened then?

2. According to 4: 46, where was the royal official's son?

Using a Bible map (in the back of your Bible), find out how far apart these two locations are.

3. According to 4:47, what did this man ask of Jesus?

What one word indicates to you the intensity of His request?

4. How does Jesus respond in 4:48?

Why do you think Jesus responded in this way to this man?

5. After a second request in 4:50, what did the man do?

6. In 4:50, the official asked Jesus to “come down.” Yet, Jesus only said “You may go. Your son will live.” Do you think it was hard for this official to accept that answer, even though it indicated he received what he really wanted – the healing of his son? Why?

7. According to 4:51-52...

... What can you determine about the travel time from these two cities?

... Who met the royal official on the way home?

... Why do you think they met him en route, instead of waiting till he arrived home?

... What was the good news?

... Why did the royal official ask about the exact time of his son's healing?

8. What does this teach us about the power of Jesus to act on our behalf?

Does this encourage you to pray even more? Why?

9. According to 4:58, what conclusion did the official make about Jesus?

How did this affect him and his household?

10. As you think about the main two elements in this story – the *son's healing* and the *official's belief* – can you make any connection between the two? Explain how they relate.

Consider This

Sometimes it can be hard to “keep on keepin’ on,” especially when results aren’t as visible as we like. Yet, God is working even when we don’t realize it, and we must exercise faith in Him even when we can’t see the end of the road. In what “invisible” areas of your life do you need to exercise more faith? Remember – looking back to see how God worked in the past can motivate us to continue trusting Him for the future.

Missing the Forest Because of the Trees

Focus Passage

John 5:1-47

“Just do what I say and nobody will get hurt.” That fictitious but famous line from movie criminals past and present rings true in this story, and it’s exactly how the ruling Jews responded to Jesus when he did a good thing in what they felt was the wrong way. As you’ll see in this encounter, they missed the whole point of Jesus’ ministry – helping people – all because they were worried about impressing people. They were so concerned with *how* Jesus did what he did that they were blinded to *who* Jesus was, a clear and tragic example of missing the forest because of the trees.

Study Questions

1. According to 5:1, in what city do we find Jesus in this passage and why?
2. Like any good city in its day, Jerusalem was surrounded by a wall that had a number of gates in it. Each gate, of course, had a name. Describe the setting in which this takes place. Give specific details.
3. According to 5:3, what kinds of people were in this area?

Specifically, 5:5 indicates there was a man who had been sick for how many years?

4. After reading 5:5-6, why do you think Jesus selected this man? (Perhaps check 5:7 for more insight.)

5. According to 5:6, what does Jesus ask him?

Without a doubt this question seems rhetorical; yet, Jesus asks it plainly. Why do you think He asked such a question?

6. How did the man respond?

7. According to 5:8, what three things does Jesus tell the man to do?

8. John 5:9 indicates he responded in what manner?

Likewise, to what extent and how quickly did he receive healing?

What implication can you draw from 5:9 about supernatural healing?

9. There is a sudden change of thought in the middle of 5:9, and the focus shifts from the man being healed to the reaction of the Jewish leaders and people who probably watched it (or at least heard about it). Why were the Jewish leaders and people upset? (see 5:16 also)

NOTE: The Jews were commanded in the Old Testament book of Leviticus not to do any work on the Sabbath. (see Deuteronomy 5:12-15 and Leviticus 23:32 for an example of this commandment.) This law followed the pattern of Jehovah's work in creation when He rested on the last day – the seventh day – from making everything. Consequently, God said the Sabbath, or last day, was a holy day, set apart for resting and worship. Since the Jews of Christ's day still saw themselves as under that Levitical law, they viewed Jesus' actions as work, regardless of the fact that it was a *good* work.

10. In your opinion, what makes some people miss the good and see the bad?

11. Based on 5:11-13...

... How much conversation did Jesus and the man have apart from the healing?

... Why do you think Jesus slipped away?

12. According to 5:14, where do Jesus and the healed man meet again?

13. What is the warning Jesus gives this man in 5:14, and why?

14. Based on Jesus' bold statement in 5:17, the Jews now had two reasons to be upset with him. List those two reasons as found in 5:18:

1.

2.

15. Beginning in 5:19 and going through the end of the chapter, Jesus preaches a message declaring and proving His own identity. What four witnesses (or evidences) does He use to make His claim?

Consider This

Though they had plenty of evidence right in front of their eyes, they still missed the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. Here's a question for you – how often do you have clear evidence regarding what God is saying, yet refuse to obey or believe? Pray for God to keep opening the eyes of your heart so that you can see the real issues facing you, and then in faith follow the Lord.

Look Who Came for Dinner

Focus Passage

John 6:1-15

Everybody loves to be surprised. Unless it means someone is unexpectedly showing up for dinner! Jesus knew all too well about surprises and unexpected guests – remember the last time He was at a party with too many guests (John 2)? That’s right – He ended up turning water into wine! Like that first miracle, Jesus again calls upon His supernatural abilities to feed a few extra guests.

Study Questions

1. After reading 6:1-3, describe the setting by answering the following questions.
 - Where was Jesus?
 - Who was He with?
 - Why do you think He was getting away for a bit?
2. Why did the crowds continue to follow Him?
3. A year has passed since we first met Jesus. How do we know this? (There’s a hint in 6:4.)

Why do you think John mentions the fact that a Jewish *feast* is at hand just before he describes a miracle involving *food*?

4. According to 6:5, what prompted Jesus to action? In other words, what did He see that made Him realize there was a need?

5. John 6:5 mentions the test Jesus put to His disciples, specifically Philip. What was that test?

6. What was Philip's response in 6:7?

7. What does this tell you about his personality and character traits, both positive and negative?

8. How many *men* sat down? Speculate on how many women and children could have also been there.

9. This miracle is filled with specifics. Read through the entire focus passage and list any and all specific quantities cited.

10. According to 6:10-11,
 - How did Jesus organize the people for such a large “dinner on the grounds?”

 - How did He distribute the food?

 - What did Jesus do just before the disciples distributed the bread and fish?

 - Were second helpings available? How do you know?

11. Like turning water into wine, feeding thousands from a few barley loaves and fishes was – and still is – physically impossible. The crowd on the grass knew this as well, and was aware they had just watched something unexplainable. What did the people say after this miracle?

12. An interesting word in 6:14 is the very first word in the verse – “*after*.” Why do you think people are more quick to believe after they see results (sight-based belief) than before they have visible proof (faith-based belief)?

13. Apparently, the crowd had some political ideas in mind for Jesus. Read 6:15, then answer the following questions.

- What were the crowd’s intentions?
- How were they going to go about it?
- What did Jesus do to stop this?
- Why do you think the crowd wanted to take this action?
- Why do you think He didn’t want this to happen?

14. While Scripture never clues us in to what Jesus felt when He withdrew again to the mountain after the miracle, speculate on how He probably felt once He got away with His disciples. Do you think He was disappointed in the crowd’s response? Why or why not?

Do you think maybe He sensed frustration? Why or why not?

Consider This

While Jesus no doubt supplies all our needs, it isn’t for selfish reasons or political clout. And we shouldn’t try and use God for our own agenda or purposes, like just filling our empty bellies. His works are designed to accomplish something more important, not just provide on-lookers with a mere magic show or a great act. They are designed to get us to believe that He is the Son of God who can save our souls! Have you been trying to seek God’s work in your life for selfish reasons? Are you only interested in what God can do when it has visible benefits to you? Pray and ask the Lord to forgive you, then begin to use God’s work to point others to the greatest miracle of all – the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ!

Some People Just Don't Get It

Focus Passage

John 6:22-66

Doesn't everyone enjoy the smell of fresh-baked bread? Yum, yum! My mouth waters just thinking about it! There are all kinds of breads: White, wheat, rye, sour dough, pumpernickel, and many more. Jesus introduces us here to a new kind of bread: The Bread of Life. But follow closely and don't jump to conclusions. If you do, you may find yourself like the Jews in the passage – people who had the facts right in front of them but just didn't get it.

Study Questions

1. According to 6:22-24, why did the crowd come looking for Jesus?

How did they realize He was gone?

2. In 6:26, Jesus affirms the reason they came looking for Him, doesn't He?

How do you think the people felt when confronted with their true motives?

3. According to 6:28, what did they want to do?

What do you think they were referring to by the phrase "*works of God*"?

4. What does Jesus consider to be the "*work of God*" that we are to do, based on 6:29?

5. Since believing was going to be a hard step for these Jewish followers, what did they ask for in 6:30?

6. According to 6:30-31, what specifically were they looking for?

7. The Jews put much trust in Moses and the Law. How do we know this (6:31-32)?

8. What does Jesus call Himself in 6:35-40?

He not only makes a simple declaration about who he is, but he backs it up with bold statements about how people should respond and what will happen if they do. Describe Jesus' comments in your own words.

9. Why did this declaration trouble the Jews and cause them to grumble (6:41)?

10. According to 6:42, what specific physical element was keeping them from seeing the spiritual meaning?

11. Jesus' answer to the Jews' grumbling sounds rather cannibalistic, doesn't it? Read 6:43-51, and summarize what Jesus meant when He used phrases like "eat of His flesh" and "drink of His blood."

12. What miracle had these same Jews just witnessed the day before?

Do you think this affected Jesus' choice of words? Why?

13. Look back to John 3, and think about Nicodemus. He, too, missed an analogy, didn't he?

What was that analogy?

14. Think about these two analogies: Being *born again* and *eating and drinking of Jesus*. What one word best sums up what Jesus is trying to get people to do?

See John 3:16 and 6:29 for help. Have you taken that all-important step in your life?

15. In 6:41, the Jews began to "*grumble*." In 6:52 they began to "*argue sharply*." Why do you think there is a progression in the intensity of the situation?

16. According to 6:60 and 6:66, what was the result of Jesus' comments and the sharp division in the crowd?

17. Look back at 6:10 – about how many were following Jesus and enjoying the benefits? Now look at 6:67 – to how many does He direct His challenging question? Why was there such a reduction?

18. What conclusions can you draw from your answers to question 17 about how people respond to increased challenges?

In light of this, should Jesus have lowered his expectations and made it easier for people to believe?

Should we? Why or why not?

19. In 6:68, how does Peter respond to the Lord's question?

20. What is different about his response than the response of the Jews? In other words, what indicates that Peter *"got it"* while the Jews never could quite *"get it?"*

Consider This

Though some don't get it, make sure you do! Don't miss the spiritual significance of the Savior all because you're worried about the physical limitations of your understanding. Exercise faith and trust the Lord! Open the eyes of your heart and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the work of God you must accomplish. And when you do, you'll finally "get it" like never before!

The Good? The Bad? The Christ?

Focus Passage

John 7:1-53

It's yet another time when the Jews are required to be in Jerusalem, this time to camp and remember when they came out of Egypt and lived in the wilderness. Unlike other specific encounters with one or two people, this passage deals with the reactions of various groups. Some already knew of Jesus; others were afraid of Him; still others sought to kill Him. One thing was certain – everyone had an opinion. And why not? Jesus rightfully brings everyone to a point of decision about who He is and why he or she should believe He is the Son of God.

Study Questions

1. According to 7:1-5...

... Where was Jesus and why?

... What feast was taking place?

... Where was this feast going to be held?

... Who urged Jesus to go to the Feast? Why?

2. According to 7:6-9...

... How did Jesus answer the invitation to go to the feast?

... What did Jesus end up doing?

... What do you think he meant by, "*The right 'time' for me has not yet come?*"

3. According to 7:14-20, Jesus made His way to the Feast and began teaching in the Temple courts. This brought about two primary reactions. List them below.

Who

How

4. What miracle – or miracles – do you think Jesus is referring to in 7:21 and 7:23?

5. Jesus gives the Jewish leaders and people a direct command in 7:24. In what ways can His command be applied to your life today?

6. As the situation heats up, questions began to arise. Make a list of all the questions that people asked, sincere or sarcastic, between 7:25-44.

7. Few chapters give us a better glimpse into the many different types of people Jesus ministered to than John 7. List the various groups who came in contact with Jesus in this chapter.

8. According to 7:39, what is given to those who believe?

9. Based on 7:39, what event had to happen in order for the Spirit to come?

10. In what chapter of John have you heard of Nicodemus before?

Based on how Nicodemus seemingly defends Jesus in 7:45-52, speculate on Nicodemus' opinion of Jesus at this point.

11. Do you think Nicodemus was a genuine believer by now, or still a curious follower? Why?

12. Compare what Nicodemus says in 7:51 with what Jesus said in verse 7:24. What is the common principle?

13. The chapter ends with an interesting comment in 7:53, almost implying that while everyone had an opinion about Jesus, few were willing to act on it. So they just went home! Write the verse below, and then write a statement describing why you think very few people in John 7 acted on their opinion.

14. In light of the previous question, how is the ending of John 7 similar to the way we sometimes treat church and the message we hear every week from God's Word?

Consider This

Jesus definitely stirs the mix of popular opinion. But for a reason – He wants people to believe! Once the Jews heard His Word and saw His work, they had to decide for themselves – *is this man really God?* But it wasn't enough to simply form *an opinion*; they needed to act on *the right opinion*. Yes, acting on what Jesus says – not just nodding and going home – is what brings his work into your life and heart. After hearing his Word and seeing his work, are you ready to believe? If you have believed, what can you do to help others believe? Remember – everyone's got an opinion. Let's help them believe the right one!

Starting Over

Focus Passage

John 8:1-11

Some sins just seem unforgivable, don't they? While you know in your mind that's not true, your heart still believes too often that something you've done is probably going to condemn you forever. That's exactly how the ruling leaders wanted a lady in John 8 to feel, and she was no doubt buying it. But Jesus steps in with a different option – mercy and forgiveness!

Study Question

1. Based on 8:1-2, where was Jesus, who was He with and what was He doing?
2. According to 8:3, who interrupted Him?
3. In 8:3, who did the Pharisees bring to Jesus and why?

What exact sin were they accusing her of?

4. What were they hoping would happen to the woman? To Jesus?
5. What was the hidden agenda of the Pharisees, according to 8:5-6?
6. According to 8:6, what was Jesus' first reaction to their accusation?

Did it stop the questioning?

7. In your opinion and based on the effects it had upon the crowd, what do you think Jesus wrote on the ground?

8. Circle the word "*stone*" in 8:5, and then circle the word "*condemn*" in 8:10 and 8:11. What do you think is the connection between these two words?

9. Based on the two words you circled, what do you think the Pharisees were saying about how sin should be handled?

Do you think they wanted her to receive grace and a "second chance?" Why?

10. Grace is always something undeserved. It's easy to withhold it from people we don't like. What did Jesus see in this person that made Him think they were worthy of His grace?

11. According to 8:9, what happened to the crowd?

In what way did this occur?

12. Jesus indicated in 8:11 that He had one expectation. What was His direct command to the woman?

13. Based on 8:9-11, do you think the woman believed in Jesus, or simply became glad she avoided stoning?

14. Sins we commit that leave us feeling we have no hope of ever being forgiven are called *condemning sins*. And while we know God will forgive all sins except unbelief, we still often give in to the lie of condemning sins and live beaten down, guilt-ridden lives because of something we have done in the past. That's exactly what the Pharisees wanted Jesus to do – condemn her forever with no hope! But Jesus didn't do that, did He? And while He didn't excuse her sin, He did offer her hope and the opportunity to start over. He offers that to you as well. List below sins you have committed that you – and probably others — feel are “unforgivable” but are really only weapons used by Satan to make you feel condemned forever with no hope:

Consider This

Jesus can forgive you of these, but you must confess them and allow His grace to wash over you with “second chance” mercy. Have you confessed these sins, put them under the blood of Jesus, and removed yourself from their false condemnation? Allow Jesus to forgive you, accept His full mercy, then go on your way resolved to move beyond that condemning sin. Only through Jesus can you leave Satan's condemnation behind!

The Blind Man and the Blind Men

Focus Passage

John 9:1-41

Every one of us, at some point or another, has found ourselves in the dark. It may have been a physical darkness, an emotional darkness, or even a spiritual darkness. It seems all people have to experience the misery of confusion in order to appreciate the clarity of life. Sometimes though, as we'll see in this story, physical blindness isn't the only thing keeping people from seeing Jesus.

Study Questions

1. Look back to 8:59. Where is Jesus coming from?

Do you remember in what city the Temple is located?

2. In 9:1, Jesus encounters what kind of man?

What did the disciples ask Jesus about this man?

3. Why do you think the disciples assumed someone had sinned?

4. What did Jesus say was the reason for the physical handicap?

What do you think Jesus was referring to by this statement?

5. In 8:5, what does Jesus call Himself?

How would that be important to a blind man?

6. Go back and read John 5:8 again, and then compare it with 9:6-7. Speculate on why Jesus healed this way.

7. What was the neighbor's reactions to this healing in 9:8-12?

8. Speculate on why the neighbors took the formerly blind man to the Pharisees in 9:13.

9. Uh, oh – It's the Sabbath! Problems are just around the corner! Look back in your study and find who else Jesus healed on the Sabbath? Why is this a recurring problem for the Pharisees?

10. We may not know what caused the blind man's physical limitation, but we do know what was causing the Pharisees' spiritual blindness. What was keeping them from seeing the true identity of Jesus?

11. The Pharisees had two schools of thought on this healing. What were they?

12. According to 9:20-23...
 - ... Who else was brought in to help figure out the miracle?

 - ... How did they react?

 - ... Why did they react this way?

13. After the Pharisees still refused to see the truth, what startling comment does Jesus make in 9:27?

14. According to 9:34, what did the Pharisees finally do to the formerly blind man?

In your opinion, why did they want to do this? Explain.

15. Based on 9:35-38...

... What one thing did Jesus ask the blind man when they met again?

... What key word is found in this passage that is also found in most all the other encounters?

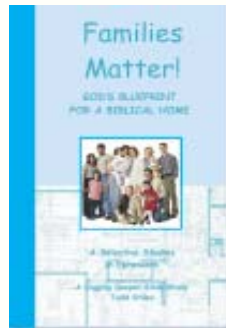
... What was the result of the man's first reaction to Jesus once he believed?

16. Look back to 9:25. Though short and simple, this verse contains the powerful testimony of the blind man. Write your testimony in just such a way – short, powerful, and to the point.

Consider This

Seeing Jesus is not just an issue of physical sight; you've got to see him with your heart (believe)! Have you? If not, what is stopping you from trusting him by faith? If you have, what things are "blinding" the eyes of your friends who haven't believed yet? What can you do to help them 'see' Christ better and more clearly?

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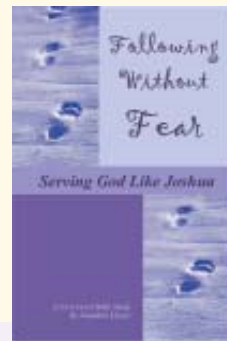
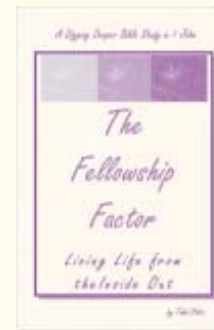


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