

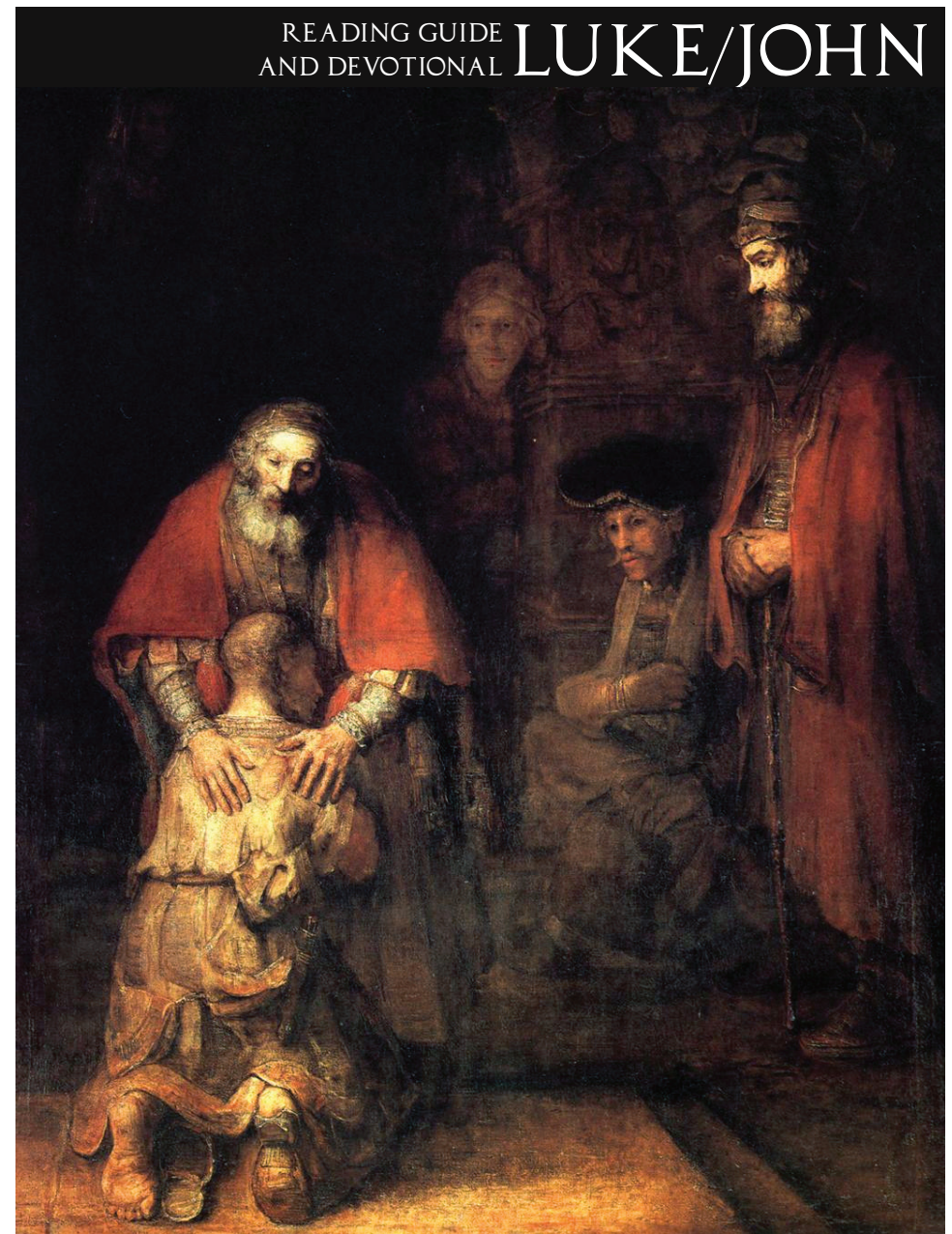
ABOUT THE COVER IMAGE

The Return of The Prodigal Son, by Rembrandt

This month's image depicts Jesus' parable of the prodigal son as recorded in Luke 15. Rembrandt has chosen the moment of embrace as the image to paint. The son who had wandered away foolishly now returns, and the father embraces him without reservation. The older brother, who has always been "the good son", watches coldly from afar.

Who do you identify with in this image?

In Henri Nouwen's book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, the author asks this same question of himself. Throughout sequential decades as he reencountered this painting and Luke 15, he found that he could identify himself with each of the three main characters - the wondering son, the pious older son, and at the time of writing he was hoping to become more like the loving father.



FROM THE CROSS TO NEW CREATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS



The Gospel: A Spiritual Revolution

Family Worship: Easter Sunday Review
by Jared Kennedy

Luke At a Glance

What's New? - Luke

Luke Reading and Devotional
Teachings and Lessons
Jesus' Mission

John At a Glance

What's New? - John

John Reading and Devotional
The Son of God Arrives
The Son of God Makes the Way

THE GOSPEL: A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION

For the past four weeks, Sojourn has studied the first two Gospels: Matthew and Mark. This month, beginning today, Sojourn will study the second two, Luke and John and we invite you to join us (or continue with us) as we read more accounts of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is one of, if not *the* most captivating and polarizing figure in human history, and his message was far more edgy and counter-cultural than one would gather from the popular, soft-focus pictures of him petting a lamb or bouncing a child on his knee. The Jesus of the Bible is a man of hard words, radical claims and enormous compassion. His life and ministry sparked a movement that exploded throughout Palestine, Rome, Greece and beyond and that has endured thousands of years. Truly, the spark that lit the fuse of this spiritual revolution was a cross and the explosion was an empty tomb that had once been full.

HE IS RISEN!

The gospel, the good news that Jesus died and rose again in order to rescue us from sin and darkness, is truly cause for celebration. In a very real sense, it's the celebration of our homecoming. And today, Easter Sunday, we celebrate the climax of the gospel – the resurrection of Jesus.

It's a difficult thing to say any one part of the gospel story is most important. It would be like saying one side of a triangle was more important than another; it's all three sides that make the shape. Take Jesus' birth, death or resurrection away and Christianity unravels. Still, there's something special about the miracle we celebrate at Easter.

Ligon Duncan, a pastor from Jackson, Mississippi, said this:

The resurrection is an inextricable core component of the good news of salvation. If you talk about the gospel, you have to talk about the resurrection. And, if you talk about the resurrection, you have to talk about the gospel because the one entails the other. When we are talking about the resurrection, we are talking about the gospel; when we are talking about the gospel, we're talking about the resurrection. Reject the gospel, and you reject salvation. Reject the resurrection, and you reject the gospel. They are that closely tied together...The resurrection of Jesus Christ is part and parcel of the good news that Jesus preached.¹

When a handful of women found an open and empty grave early one morning, all the work that God had been doing for thousands of years, the very message Jesus brought, reached its highest pitch. A perfect sacrifice had been made to restore us to God and the man who was sacrificed, Jesus, had literally risen from the dead (body and all; he was no ghost but a whole man), proving that Jesus is who he said he is and that he did indeed conquer sin and therefore death. The path to salvation, the homeward path to relationship with the loving God who made us, was finally made clear. It was finished. There is no more work to be done! All that's left is for us to *understand* what has been done on our behalf and *respond* in faith. Easter is so special because it's the celebration of the wonderful end to the mystery of how God would save mankind.

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Of course, Easter and its celebration of the Risen Jesus has always challenged skeptical people. And their skepticism is seemingly justifiable. It's pretty outlandish to claim that a man died and rose from the grave. Logic would dictate that either

Jesus was not really dead or that Jesus didn't really rise. Surely it was either a hoax or a made-up legend.

There is a great, short book about Easter – and Sojourn would be happy to give you one for free – called *The Case For Easter* by Lee Strobel. Strobel, an atheist at the time, tries to debunk the resurrection by grilling prominent and respected scholars on key questions. The first question: Did Jesus really die, or did he just pass out and later wake up?

Strobel talks at length with Alexander Metherell, a highly credentialed medical doctor and engineer, who reasons step by step through Jesus' torture and crucifixion, explaining that survival was impossible. He concludes with this:

(Jesus) was already in hypovolemic shock from the massive blood loss (from his flogging) even before the crucifixion started. He couldn't possibly have faked his death, because you can't fake the inability to breathe for that long. Besides, the spear thrust into his heart would have settled the issue once and for all.²

Strobel also talks at length to distinguished historian William Lane Craig about a second question: Did Jesus really rise? It's an engaging debate full of alternate theories (mostly about the reliability of the Biblical accounts), which Craig convincingly debunks. His conclusion is challenging:

I think people who push these alternative theories would admit, 'Yes, our theories are implausible, but they're not as improbable as the idea that this spectacular miracle occurred.' At this point, however, the matter is no longer a historical issue; instead it's a philosophical question about whether miracles are possible.³

In the end, reliable scholars have established very strongly that the writers of the Bible recorded events that they absolutely believed were true – Jesus really died, his tomb was really empty and he really appeared to his followers in an actual, factual physical body – and these events cemented their belief that Jesus was the Son of God and their personal Risen Savior and Lord. So the question isn't really whether the Bible's writers were being honest (they honestly believed), but whether you believe the story they tell. And that's a question that can't be reasoned out with logic or 100% convincingly argued. Whether you believe the story the Bible tells is a matter of faith.

THE OFFER OF THE BIBLE

Here's what the Bible offers – an explanation for why the world seems so wrong and yet so good at times, and hope for the victory of the good over the wrong, but not a victory won through war, good deeds, social justice or any other human effort. No, a victory won by a man who died and rose again, a victory offered to you as a free gift if you'll only just believe. And a final promise that, one day, faith will become sight and those who believe will see and share in the victory, and enjoy a world restored.

I hope that you will read Luke and John over the next month, and, if what the Bible offers appeals to you, that you will read with an open heart. Reliable witnesses testified that they saw Jesus die with their own eyes and yet saw him alive again just days later. It changed their lives, it gave them hope and it brought them joy; and the hope and joy of a changed life has endured, through seasons of persecution and acceptance, up until today. I hope that you take the Bible up on its offer.

¹ Sermon, 'Why the Resurrection Matters', preached Easter 2002

² *The Case for Easter*, by Lee Strobel

³ *The Case for Easter*, by Lee Strobel



FAMILY WORSHIP: EASTER SUNDAY REVIEW

By Jared Kennedy

Here are some simple ideas for reviewing the Easter story with your family during the week after Easter. Family worship is getting together as a family to hear from God by reading His Word then responding to Him through asking, praying, singing, and memorizing. This brief outline will help you lead your family in a short time of worship. Children should be involved as much as their age allows. This devotion should last around 15 minutes. If this is a new experience for your family, keep it very simple. Have the whole family gather in the living room or bedroom, or around the table together. Even the very young children should participate. Turn off any radios or televisions that might be distractions.

Step #1: Hear from God’s Word—Read the Easter story from Luke 24: 1-12. If your children are confident readers, ask them to read portions of scripture from their Bibles. Prepare in advance to explain difficult concepts and words.

Step #2: Respond to God—Truly hearing from God involves responding to what he has said. Here are some ideas for leading your children to respond to God.

Ask: Ask your children questions about what you have read: “Why did the women carry spices to the tomb?” “Who were the men in clothes that gleamed like lightning?” “What did they say? (The angels’ words are the most important words in this passage.)” “Who were the Eleven?” “Did the Eleven believe the women?” “Why was it hard for them to believe?” “Why is it hard for us to believe?”

Write some of their responses here:

Pray: Lead the family in a time of prayer. Include elements of Praise, Thanksgiving, Confession and Requests. The prayer time should focus on the passage you have just read and be a response of worship to God:

Father, we are full of doubt. It is hard for us to believe that you are alive and that your words are true. We honor Christ like a dead man, but we do not serve Him as the living King. Help us to see that He is risen. Help us to believe.

Sing: Select a song that is familiar to your family. Using a worship CD may be helpful. Many families prefer to sing without background music. Choose songs that remind you of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Sojourn Kids has posted some original music and chords you can use:

“The Cross is Not the End” (<http://sojournkids.com/2009/04/the-cross-was-not-the-end-an-easter-song/>) by Bill and Courtney Bell

“God’s Love Goes On Forever” (<http://sojournkids.com/2009/04/new-kids-song-gods-love-goes-on-forever/>) by Chandí Plummer

Memorize: Memorize the words of the angel in verses 5-8. Repeat the words aloud with your family, and put them in a prominent place in your home (like the refrigerator door) where family members can regularly see them.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”

Resources: Tony Kummer, “Family Worship Guide for Easter,” <http://ministry-to-children.com/easter-family-worship-guide>



LUKE AT A GLANCE

Who – Luke, a physician and companion of the apostle Paul during his two imprisonments (also, likely the only non-Jewish contributor to the New Testament)

What – a collected account Jesus’ ministry on earth and his work of salvation, to display God’s work and to serve as a resource for the church.

When – AD 60-63

Where – likely researched in Palestine and written in Rome while Paul was in prison for two years, though possibly finalized in Greece a few years later.

Why – Luke wrote his account of Jesus’ ministry specifically for Theophilus. He gathered eyewitness accounts of Jesus and arranged them clearly and in order so that readers could clearly and reliably know of the astonishing events that took place and be strengthened in their faith or brought to faith anew.

As you read Luke, this chart will help you follow the main themes of his writing.

Focus	Introduction of Son of Man v. 1:1	Ministry of Son of Man v. 4:13 v. 4:14 v. 9:50	Rejection of Son of Man v. 9:51 v. 19:27	Crucifixion and Resurrection of Son of Man v. 19:28 v. 24:53
Divisions	Advent	Activities	Antagonism and Admonition	Application and Authentication

Adapted from *Talk Thru the Bible*
Ken Boa and Bruce Wilkinson

WHAT'S NEW? – LUKE

In the first two chapters of Luke, we see God at work doing a new thing (namely setting the stage for Jesus and bringing his Son into the world) and we see people consistently responding. Mary, Zechariah, the shepherd, Simeon and the prophetess Anna all perceived God speaking and moving and they all responded by bursting into song and praise to God. It’s a beautiful picture. We believe God speaks and moves when his Word is preached and sung – that’s why Sojourn gathers every Sunday. We want you to catch a vision for people all over this city being able to hear God’s Word and respond *where they are* every week. Imagine the movement that could occur in our city as more and more people encounter the Living God and respond. Here are some ways you can be a part of this movement:

Invite – you can invite someone to your Community Group, to a Sunday gathering. Offer someone the opportunity to see and respond.

Make space – go the extra mile to make our church welcoming. What are some things that make you feel comfortable at Sojourn? How can you offer those things to others? Maybe it’s volunteering to serve with the kids or serving coffee or greeting. Maybe it’s giving up your seat for a guest, or giving up that coveted aisle seat to sit in the middle of a row. Maybe it’s taking a minute and a risk to start a conversation with someone you haven’t met. Get creative! Make welcoming space!

In Luke 5:33-38, Jesus offers a teaching about wine and wineskins. Basically, the essence of his message is this: When God does something new, he doesn’t just cram it into the old way of doing things. The old ways, like old wineskins, are often rigid and set and burst if stretched. No, new wine goes in new wineskins; new mission comes with new ways of doing things that are fresh and flexible. At Sojourn, we believe God is working out new things in our midst – and this brings us joy and challenges. As our church grows and develops, we must stay flexible and humble. Here are some things to pray for:

Pray that God would help you remain humble, to try new things even when they feel strange or threatening.

Pray that God would increase your trust that he is at work so you can step out of your comfort zone for the sake of his message and mission moving forward in our city and region.

Pray for Sojourn’s leaders, that their vision would be clear and focused on God’s mission.

Pray that people would be able to hear the gospel and that people would come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord – and that this motivation would help you to accept and welcome changes for the sake of more people knowing Jesus.



READING PLAN

We invite you to read through the first half of Luke this week using the following plan.

- Luke 1-2 Luke 8-9
- Luke 3-5 Luke 10-12
- Luke 6-7

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Day 1 - Luke 1:53

When approaching the Gospel of Luke, or any other Gospel, or any other book of the Bible, one lesson is crucial: Come hungry. You need spiritual hunger to receive the things of God. If you are spiritually full, if you think you've got life figured out and have no needs, if you are rich, then you will walk away from the Scriptures empty. But if you are spiritually hungry, if you have a yearning for more than this life offers, then you will be filled with good things. There are many things that can make you feel 'full' spiritually. Your job, your relationships, pleasures – these all offer 'fullness'. If you look for ultimate satisfaction in those things, then the Bible won't seem to offer you much. But if you have found that work, other people and pleasures eventually let you down and leave you wanting, then bring your hunger to the Word and be filled. As we start this month's study, consider what makes you feel full. What would it mean for you to come before the Scriptures hungry?

Day 2 - Luke 3:11-14

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus and here's what he had to say: be *content* with what you have. Contentment is a foreign word in our culture of 'more, more, more!' John would look at our McMansions, our walk-in closets and our hunger for money and scoff. He says we should be content with what we have and even able to give some away. If we were content with our level of wealth and possessions, we could see that our hunger for more is actually a hunger for spiritual things – and we would be prepared to receive Jesus, who offers spiritual satisfaction. Imagine yourself taking John the Baptist on a tour of your home and life. What do you think he would say? Where can you be content with what you have and redirect your hunger to God?

Day 3 - Luke 6:27-36

Jesus' teachings to 'love your enemies' and, 'turn the other cheek,' are very familiar inside and outside the church. Just as much about being active in love, these teachings are about being active in *not* hating. The norm is to turn against someone who wrongs you – and we often do this with our words first. We say we're 'venting'. It's totally normal to react this way, and Jesus acknowledges this. But he also tells us that God's way is different. Venting stokes an anger that will only grow. We all know the person who is consumed with anger – maybe we've overheard them in a restaurant filling the air with a torrent of venom. This kind of hardened

bitterness is hard to be around, and even harder to recognize in ourselves. The good news is, Jesus died for our tendency to vent and grow bitter and offers us a new heart that's built by grace, for graciousness. How do you respond with your words when someone hurts or offends you? Ask that God would give you new speech.

Day 4 - Luke 8:16-17

'Let your light shine.' It's a stock phrase of church's trying to get people to talk about their faith more. 'Hide it under a bushel? NO! I'm gonna let it shine.' The core of this church teaching is, 'stop hiding your light and start telling someone about Jesus.' But notice what Jesus says next – it's impossible to hide your light. You simply can't. Nothing is hidden that won't be brought out in the open. First, if you're a Christian, your light is always shining to others as they watch you live your life. The problem arises when your words and your life don't shed the same light. Second, everyone's light is shining before God, Christians and not. God knows you through and through and knows you either have the light of Christ or the light of darkness. As you consider these two verses, don't ask yourself whether you are shining your light or not, ask what kind of light you have and then whether your words match your light.

Day 5 - Luke 11:11-13

These verses have been a source of comfort for countless people – God gives good gifts to his children, even better that we give to our own children. Meditate on this truth and let your heart be glad. Dig a little deeper, too. Oftentimes we feel like we have a snake or a scorpion on our hands. Maybe we're battling illness, maybe we're struggling with work or school, maybe a relationship is lacerating our hearts. How deep the comfort to realize that what seems like a snake now is actually itself a gift from God and will turn out to be food for our spiritual growth! This is the kind of comfort that is offered in Christ – the comfort of having God as our Father and knowing that therefore all things work together for our good. Are you living in this comfort today?

READING PLAN

Finish Luke with us this week. Feel free to check off the boxes as you read.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 13-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 21-22 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 16-18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 23-24 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 19-20 | |

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Day 1 - Luke 13:22-27

To understand Jesus' mission, we must understand that the path to God's Kingdom is gated by a very narrow door. The door is so narrow that it is literally impossible for any of us to walk through it because we would have to be perfect. But Jesus' mission was to be perfect and make a perfect substitution for us (his perfection for our imperfection) so that we could walk through the narrow door. Faith that Jesus died for us and rose to save us gives us safe passage. Many other ways are offered to us, but only one way is true. Praise God that the narrow door is open for now – anyone has the opportunity to enter and Jesus urges us to make every effort to do so. Today, ask yourself if you are trying to come to God via a ladder over the wall (being a good person, doing religious things, seeking personal enlightenment) or through faith that Jesus has made the only way for you.

Day 2 - Luke 18:31-33

It's easy to read the Gospels and focus on each episode in and of itself – and you end up with a string of teachings and good moral lessons. But we must always read the Gospels with a bird's eye view at least in the back of our mind – that all of Jesus' teachings and lessons are *always* leading up to his death and resurrection. If we only look at Jesus' teachings, we will find a standard that we can't measure up to and that will ultimately crush us. But when we look to Jesus' sacrifice, we see that he met the standard for us and frees us to respond to him in faith, obeying his commands without the crushing pressure to do so or die. Spend some time today thinking about just how much Jesus has done for you. By faith, you are forgiven. It's done. Your shame of being the kind of person Jesus taught against? It's gone, washed away by his blood. How might you live with this freedom?

Day 3 - Luke 20:19

The Pharisees killed Jesus because he brought them under condemnation. But you have done exactly the same thing. Just as much as Jesus died because of the evil hearts of the Pharisees, he died because of your evil heart and mine. The whole reason Jesus lived at all was because all people – all meaning you, all meaning me – needed a way to be right with God. So while the Pharisees might have done the act, all of our sin brought Jesus into the world to die. The first step to understanding the message and mission of Jesus is knowing that Jesus died

because of your own personal sins; it's admitting that you're broken, not whole. Have you made this confession? Do you perhaps need to make it anew?

Day 4 - Luke 22:19-22

Yesterday, we spent time thinking about the problem of our own sin. Today, spend time thinking about Jesus' response. In his words at the last supper, we see Jesus making it clear what he was about to do for the men in the room, but also for us. He was about to die, to make a new covenant, a new binding relationship between us and God. The second step to understanding the message and mission of Jesus is knowing that Jesus responded to our personal sins with his personal sacrifice. He did not leave us where we were, but he died to raise us up. Because he gave his body and his blood, we are whole, not broken. Have you responded to Jesus' sacrifice in faith? How does it influence your life to know that you are in a new, binding relationship with God because of what Jesus did?

Day 5 - Luke 24:44-49

In Luke's Gospel, the final act of Jesus' mission – after he had died and rose again – was to leave his followers with a precious gift. He opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures and see how they pointed to him (Luke 24:27). This gift has enabled the church to open the Bible and preach the good news of Jesus for centuries. The church isn't perpetuating some legend – it is opening up the Scriptures given by God and using the understanding Jesus has given via the Holy Spirit (the promised 'power from on high') to open the eyes and hearts of people to see that Jesus has covered our sin and brought us back to life with God.



JOHN AT A GLANCE

Who – John, Jesus’ 12 closest disciples and a leader in the early church (though he never refers to himself by name, only as ‘the disciple Jesus loved’)

What – John gives his eyewitness account of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, including much valuable insight into Jesus’ teachings about himself, his Kingdom and his Father who sent him.

When – AD 85-90 (likely the last Gospel to be written, also the most unique)

Where – John likely wrote his Gospel in Ephesus, in modern day Turkey, near the end of his life.

Why – John wrote his account of Jesus for one purpose: ‘so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31). John is writing to convince, as a matter of urgency so that you might hear and believe all that Jesus claimed to be and so that your belief might bring you life instead of death, light instead of darkness, truth instead of lies. John’s desire for you to truly understand Jesus is most clear in chapters 13-17: Jesus’ teaching at the last supper. These were Jesus’ final and most clear teachings about himself before dying and they are the centerpiece of John’s account. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand all that was about to happen and John wants you to understand as well.

As you read John, this outline will be helpful in following the overall narrative.

Focus	Incarnation of the Son of God	Presentation of the Son of God	Opposition to the Son of God	Preparation of the Son’s Followers	Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Son of God
	v. 1:1	v. 1:18	v. 1:19	v. 4:54	v. 5:1
				v. 12:50	v. 13:1
					v. 17:26
					v. 18:1
					v. 21:25
Divisions	Introduction to Christ	Revelation of Christ	Rejection of Christ	Revelation from Christ	Rejection of Christ

Adapted from *Talk Thru the Bible*
Ken Boa and Bruce Wilkinson

WHAT’S NEW? - JOHN

In John 3, a man named Nicodemus approaches Jesus in the night to talk about the kingdom of God. Jesus tells him that the kingdom of God is only accessible through new birth – through having new spiritual life through faith in Jesus. It’s through belief in Jesus that we are saved from God’s judgment. It’s not through anything we do, but only through what he has already done.

As we long to see God’s kingdom advance in Louisville, we must realize that this only happens through people experiencing new birth – hearing of Jesus and responding to him with faith. We must be a church that is all about Jesus Christ and what he has done, and not about how people dress, how they vote, how educated or uneducated they are. It’s not what we do or don’t do that matters – it’s whether we have the new birth Jesus offers.

Being a church that truly lives out this truth can have a drastic impact on who feels truly welcomed among us. Spend some time in conversation with other Christians (in community group, over coffee, while barbecuing) about what it looks like to accept people based on Christ and not on some list of rules and preferences of our own.

In John 13, Jesus gives us a new command: love one another as he has loved us. This, too, can have a dramatic impact on the people who feel welcomed in our midst. But how did Jesus love us? He gave us his life and he gave us truth. Jesus’ love is marked with sacrifice and truth.

Now, Jesus isn’t calling us to be all warm and fuzzy, everybody’s right and nobody’s wrong. No, Jesus is calling us to be honest about God’s kingdom and our need of a savior. But at the same time, we must be willing to sacrifice – to love and serve others.

Jesus went out to people who needed him, the physician going to the sick. Our love for others should look like this. We should be willing to give up comfort, our schedule, even our finances if doing so could truly bless another and open the door to offer the love of Christ in word *and* deed. Too often, people only do one or the other. They will either preach without serving or serve without making clear why they served. At Sojourn, we want to do both. Again, spend some time talking about how to grow in love – in word and deed.



READING PLAN

This week we will read through the first half of the Gospel of John.

- John 1-2 John 7-8
- John 3-4 John 9-10
- John 5-6

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Day 1 - John 1:1-18

Right away, we can see that John's Gospel will be different. He doesn't start on earth, with a genealogy, John the Baptist or anyone visited by angels. He begins in heaven - with Jesus Christ the Word being with God and being God. John opens his gospel with a transcendent picture of Jesus, painting him as the exalted Son of God. Read this passage through two times today, prayerfully asking God to grow your affection for his Son. The first time, read through without stopping, letting the whole thing sink in. The second time, pause to dwell on words and phrases that stick out in your mind. Seek to know Jesus better.

Day 2 - John 3:19-21

It's human nature to keep things secret, especially things we are not proud of, even ashamed of. Maybe you have skeletons in your closet that you would do anything to hide. Maybe you are wrestling with shame. Hear the good news that Jesus brings - you can come into the light. He died to take your shame away, and he has made the way for you to be cleansed. It doesn't matter what you've done, Christ has done enough for you. Don't stay in darkness, but bring your baggage, your issues, your drama to the light - confess them to Christ, and even to a trusted friend - and plainly see that through him you are made right and freed from all that weight.

Day 3 - John 6:26-29

Offentimes, our motivation for coming to God is to get 'fed' - to receive comfort or some kind of material blessing. We make God out to be something we consume, or some sort of cosmic magician there to hook us up. The comfort we seek will fade and the material stuff will spoil. Jesus calls us to work for eternal life - but then he turns the whole notion of work on its head. We aren't called to acts of holiness or special sacrifices. The work of God is this: to believe the one he has sent. How do you approach God? Are you only seeking happiness? Are you trying to climb your way up to him through good deeds and holier-than-thou living? Hear Jesus' word of truth - your work is to believe (and it can take work, because there will always be temptation to doubt). All the rest of the work was done by Jesus, if you'll just receive it.

Day 4 - John 7:37-39

The Feast of the Tabernacles - the Feast during which Jesus stands and speaks - commemorated Israel's time living in tents in the wilderness, waiting for the Promised Land. Those times of wandering must have been discouraging, being thirsty and longing for a permanent home while in the desert of Egypt and Palestine. Jesus is saying that our thirst, our longing for 'home', can all be satisfied in himself. Drink a glass of water and you will be thirsty again. But through faith in Jesus, we receive his Spirit, which he likens to having a spring that wells up in your heart. In other words, our bodies are constantly striving to survive, and they will all eventually fail. True life is more than just our bodies, and Jesus offers us true life that we can enjoy both during and after our earthly lifespan. Where do you find your heart thirsting? What are you longing for? No matter what your answer is, Jesus can satisfy that longing.

Day 5 - John 10:11-18

The picture of Jesus as a good shepherd is a great place to end the week. So often we come to religion with our objections, doubts, even hostility (because of hurt we have received either from or even within the church). Our minds and hearts are full of noisy reasons not to believe (and Christians are not immune to this). Jesus says, though, that his sheep listen to his voice. Are you able to listen for Jesus, or even hear anything at all besides your own objections, doubts and hurts? Today, set those things aside for a few minutes and listen to what Jesus says in this passage. He laid down his life; it wasn't taken, it was willingly given. He gave his life for you, to restore you to God and so that you might hear his voice and follow him as he Shepherds you through this life. What does this mean to you? What does it stir in you? If you would like to talk through anything, Sojourn's pastors and leaders would love to sit down with you on Sunday and hear your questions, even your hurts and objections.

READING PLAN

We finish John, and our two month reading through the Gospels this week!

- John 11-12 John 18-19
- John 13-14 John 20-21
- John 15-17

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Day 1 – John 11:15

It's one of the most well-known, and certainly the easiest to memorize verse in the Bible: Jesus wept. Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, but why? Certainly he knew Lazarus wasn't going to be dead much longer. I think Jesus wept because he saw the hurt on the faces of Lazarus' friends and family as they mourned. John tells us that Jesus was present and responsible for the creation of the world, so he knew how it was meant to be, and he knew what was lost with the fall. Seeing the sorrow and death that sin brought into the world moved Jesus to tears. When we look at the world and things just look broken – crooked politics, natural disasters, deceit, heartache – we can be encouraged to know that Jesus weeps with us. He agrees that the world is not as it should be. But he also offers us hope – hope for a restored world and hope for our presently hurting hearts. Spend some time praying today that God would open your heart to receive and understand more deeply the hope that is found in Christ alone – for a healed heart and a healed world.

Day 2 – John 14:1-7, 15-20

These were among Jesus' final words to his followers before his death, his last message to help them understand what was coming in God's plan. Hear these great truths today. Jesus is preparing a place for us in the Father's house, and he is the way, the truth and the life – through him we can come to the Father without guilt or fear. But our hope isn't only for the future. We also have the Spirit who lives with us and in us. We are not left as orphans, to muddle through until the end. No, we have a new heart and a new life. Rejoice in this today! Renew your hope in this truth!

Day 3 – John 15:9-13

It brings Jesus joy when we live the way he commands, the way he made us to live. Such a way of life is marked by love for others that surpasses our love for ourselves. Again, this isn't a call to just live better. It's a call to the cross, to place our faith in the fact that Jesus succeeded at living the perfect life where we failed and yet still died so that we could be forgiven. And it's through faith in this that our joy is made complete. A change occurs when we place our faith in Christ – he gives us a new heart with new desires. We actually desire to live the way we were

intended (even though we still mess up). As we live more and more out of this new heart, we become more and more deeply satisfied in following Jesus' commands and we take joy in doing so. Are you lacking in joy? Ask the Father to renew your heart and re-shape your desires to follow Jesus' command.

Day 4 – John 18:28

As the Jewish leaders gave Jesus over to the Roman governor to be tried and executed, they took care to avoid ceremonial uncleanness so they could eat the Passover. For them, the Passover was their annual ritual for forgiveness of sin, not to be missed. But God was doing a new thing. They had the Son of God in their hands, the Messiah they had been longing for (because of all people, these guys knew the Scriptures by heart), but they had no idea. They wanted to rely on doing the right things, practicing the right religious rituals in order to be right with God. They were so focused on religion that they missed God at work among them. We do this too. We focus on religion and are blind to God. Those outside the church can look at religion and see a bunch of rules and hypocrites – and they want nothing to do with it. Those inside the church look to religion and think they have it all together – and they become self-righteous and even judgmental. Do either of these describe you? Today, whether you are inside or outside the church, pray that God would open your eyes to see Jesus' work for you and rescue you from the ways religion blinds you. Ask God to equip you to celebrate Jesus with others and be the church without being only 'religious'.

Day 5 – John 21:22

Nearly the last word of John's Gospel is this: look to Christ before you look to anyone else. We tend to measure ourselves against other people – thinking we're better than some or that we could never be as good as others. We tend to compare our lives to others' and want their happiness while feeling discouraged by our own hard times. Jesus gives us a gentle but firm rebuke. What he does in the lives of other people is up to him. We must follow after Jesus, not after what we see in the lives of others. Certainly we should invest in each other's lives – but it's in order to encourage them to follow Christ and receive their encouragement to do the same. Are you prone to compare your life to someone else's? Hear Jesus calling you to follow him – and trust that he is leading you through exactly the right life.