

Introducing, the book of John

The Gospel According to John was written by the apostle John. (He also authored three epistles and Revelation.) He was a son of Zebedee and Salome who may have been sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus. With his brother James and others he had operated a fishing business in Capernaum. Before following Jesus, he had been a disciple of John the Baptist.

John's book reveals the intimate knowledge of one who had been a part of Christ's inner circle. John, acquainted with the Synoptic Gospels penned by Matthew, Mark and Luke (the latter two are secondhand accounts), presented fresh material. Of the seven miracles he recounted, five are not recorded elsewhere. He included no parables but did present long discourses and discussions among which are found seven "I am" statements of Jesus.

John is intensely theological. Its stated purpose, found in John 20:31, is "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name." To that end, John tried to present solid evidence on which to base a faith that ultimately gives life. He showed how belief and unbelief in Jesus grew side by side and solidified in response to the very same words or acts.

To study and understand John, ask your self three questions:

1) What is the event (a discourse, miracle, conversation, or whatever)? 2) What does it prove or say about Jesus' divinity? 3) What were the reactions of others? (Notice the contrasts.)

As you read John, ask the Holy Spirit to confirm and strengthen your own faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

November 9, read John 1

Referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, C.S. Lewis wrote:

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (from Mere Christianity).

John wished to destroy any alternative to understanding Jesus of Nazareth as anything less than God Himself.

At the book's very outset, in sentences reminiscent of Genesis 1, John presented the God who spoke light and life into creation as being the eternal Word, equal with God and truly divine in the same way and sense the Father is divine. The Word took on flesh and lived among us to show in a vivid, tangible way what God is like (verse 14).

Now here's the irony. The Word (Christ) came to His own things, His own possessions; but His own people whom He had nurtured through many wide centuries rejected Him (verse 11). They didn't have an authentic relationship with Him because His children were and are those who receive Him (verse 12).

John gave examples of those who came into God's family through faith in His Son. For instance, John the Baptist recognized the true identity of his Cousin at His baptism (verses 29-34). Peter and Andrew accepted Jesus on the basis of the Baptist's testimony; Philip, through these brothers' witness. Nathaniel called Jesus the Son of God when He proved His supernatural knowledge.

Think: Is it theologically correct to call all people God's children? According to verses 12 and 13, how did you become a child of God?

Pray: Lord, thank You for living among us and showing us what our Father is like.

November 18, read John 10

"I am the door of the sheep ... I am the good shepherd," declared Jesus (verses 7, 14); and He was not mixing His metaphors. In oriental countries, sheep were enclosed in pens at night for their protection. Very often the shepherd lay down in the entry, literally becoming the door over which an enemy would have to pass to gain access to the sheepfold. So Jesus could say that He was both shepherd and door.

Every person who desires to be a part of Christ's flock must enter through Him. Those who seek to get in by any other means, whether other religions or philosophies or systems, are false. On the other hand, His very own hear Him (verses 3, 27), follow Him but not a stranger (verses 4, 5, 27), are known by Him (verse 27) and have eternal life and security (verse 28).

Jesus alone determines that those who believe, receive and come into a relationship with Him become His sheep. Nobody else may exclude another regardless of race, sex or nationality. He has one flock with sheep of various sizes, colors, ages and the like (verse 16). The apostle John has already indicated some of these were rich, poor, powerful, weak, intelligent and ignorant.

Again we notice the various reactions to such teaching. Some decided He was crazy or demonized (verse 20). Others were reluctant to characterize a miracle worker that way (verse 21). Many believed in Him (verse 42). Some judged Him a blasphemer because He said, "I and the Father are one, a unity" (verses 30.33). The latter group would have stoned Him but He eluded them. The hostile Jews wanted to separate what Jesus did (good works) from what He said. Our Lord would not permit that, for His acts authenticated His claims. One who does what God does is who God is.

Think: Christians will find it helpful to list everything the Shepherd has promised them in John 10. Believe Him. Praise Him. Pray: Lord, because You are my Shepherd I have everything that I need.

November 19, read John 11

The raising of four-day dead Lazarus to life was the final, grand sign of Jesus to the general populace. With that act He closed His public ministry (verse 54). Folks had had ample opportunity and facts to consider Him and render a verdict.

Our Lord knew of Lazarus' illness because his sisters had sent the information by messenger. Interestingly, they made no request of Him. Was it because they trusted His love and wisdom implicitly? Without a messenger, however, Jesus knew the man had died.

Then obeying His inner light, He traveled to Bethany. The disciples were disturbed about going back to the Jerusalem suburb. After all, they had left the city because of an attempted stoning of the Master. Their fatalistic attitude was, "Let us go ... die with Him" (verse 16).

Our Savior's reaction upon facing the sisters is highly significant. With practical Martha, He spoke theology and dealt intellectually. With emotional Mary, He wept. Thus He met each on her level of need.

Then Jesus commanded, "Remove the stone" (verse 39). He who resurrected Lazarus could have moved the stone as well. Perhaps we learn from this that what God has given us the capacity to do He expects us to do.

The result of the mighty attesting miracle of resurrection was, "Many of the Jews ... believed in Him" (verse 45). But the leaders, though believing in His signs (verse 47), rejected Him. At this point, the decision moved from the personal to the national level. Political, organized Israel made a choice based on expediency rather than justice (verses 48-50). They were determined to do away with Him.

Think: What does it mean to you personally that Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (verse 25)?

Pray: Lord, thank You for understanding my-needs and meeting them.

November 20, read John 12

The resurrected Lazarus of yesterday's reading figured largely in today's. He was an object of curiosity (verse 9), popular proof of Christ's power (verse 17) and a target of the chief priest's malice (verse 10). Also we note his return to life prompted an extravagant expression of love from his sister (verse 3).

Six days before Passover, Jesus, the apostles and disciples dined together. At the meal, Mary annointed the feet of her Lord with a perfume costing nearly a year's wages. Judas Iscariot took exception to her outpouring of adoration. His high sounding reproof masked his real and selfish reasons, actually his unbelief. Of Mary and Judas, Dr. Earl Palmer notes, "Jesus interrupted the attempt of one disciple to disqualify the worship of another disciple.... Jesus is so sure of himself and of his authority that one of the marks of that authority is the freedom he grants to those around him. He enables each disciple to express his or her own personality" (from *The Intimate Gospel*). Another has suggested that the variety of Christian churches may have more to do with temperament than with doctrine. These two ideas taken together should prevent our reproaching fellow believers whose worship is different from ours.

As Lazarus' resurrection had strengthened Mary's faith so also had it engendered hope in the multitude. Thus we understand their great demonstration at the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. They would have crowned Him, who is indeed King, their king. Even Gentiles were drawn to Jesus. As this became evident, the Savior of the world, not just of the Jews, announced, "The hour has come" (verse 23). But to bring universal blessing, He had to resist an earthly throne and be lifted up on a cross (verses 24-33).

Think: In light of his exposure to Christ, do you find Judas' unbelief unbelievable? Why or why not?

Pray: Lord, help me receive the light You give me.

November 21, read John 13

Can we - we who study how to pull our own strings, look out for Number One and use others as rungs to climb the ladder of success - comprehend that to lead is to serve? Can we relate to the humility of our Lord?

Jesus and the apostles were about to eat the Passover meal. It was the evening of His arrest and He knew it. He might have played on their emotions, demanding and receiving favors from the sorrowful bunch. But He did not capitalize on their pity or grief or guilt to secure favors; instead He gave.

With quiet strength, Christ washed and soothed the feet of a weak and discouraged lot. His calm confidence came of knowing who He was, why He was here and where He was going. One who firmly grasps those facts can concentrate on the needs of others. So knowing the Father's relationship to and purpose for Him, He "began to wash the disciples' feet" (verses 3-5).

Finally Jesus came to Peter who declared, "Never shall You wash my feet." Perhaps he said that because he was embarrassed at his own unwillingness to serve or because he thought too much of Jesus to let Him "lower" Himself in that way or because he had trouble receiving. In any case, our Savior made a significant spiritual pronouncement, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (verse 8).

Every person must be cleansed from sin through Christ's blood in order to be acceptable to God. Once one has been so washed, a full bath is not needed again; that is, he or she doesn't require repeated conversion or salvation experiences. However, walking through life's dust calls for occasional foot-washing; our postconversion sins must be confessed and cleansed as indicated in I John 1:9.

Think: Do insecure people find it harder to assume a servant's role? What spiritual service is beneath you?

Pray: Lord, I would be Your servant and serve others.

November 21, read John 13

November 23, read John 14

It was a traumatic evening for Christ's disciples; they were in Jerusalem with men bent on destroying their leader. On top of that, Judas had suddenly left the dinner table following Jesus' statement that one of them would betray Him. If that weren't enough, the Lord spoke of leaving them; and Peter's vow to follow Him was met with a prediction of denial by that disciple.

In that setting, Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled" (verse 1). Was it possible? How? "Believe in God, believe also in Me."

The means to peace is trust in Christ and in His promises.

Then Jesus assured them of three things on which they could count. The first was a home with Him in the Father's house (verses 2, 3). The relationship between Christ and the Christian is such that they will dwell together in a place specifically prepared for them. The separation of the disciples and their Teacher would only be temporary. That fact soothes a troubled heart.

Our Lord's second promise was that of answered prayer (verse 14). His followers could continue talking to Him and He would hear them. The evidence would be their receiving what they asked for. That fact soothes a troubled heart.

Finally Jesus promised another Helper, the Holy Spirit (verse 16). Because of the unity of the Father, Son and Spirit, in speaking of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, Christ could say, "I will come to you" (verse 18). The Comforter would abide in them forever so they would never be abandoned by God. That fact soothes a troubled heart.

Were the Twelve still upset? Jesus handed them a gift to undergird them in the wretched day to follow: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you" (verse 27).

Think: Can you claim the three promises of John 14 and find comfort in your trying circumstances?

Pray: Lord, I accept Your gift of peace in my distressful situations.

November 24, read John 15

Jesus and His disciples had left the home where they had celebrated Passover and were walking toward the Garden of Gethsemane (14:31). As they went, our Lord taught them about relationships. He spoke of:

Their relationship to Himself (verses 1-11). Jesus illustrated it as His being a Vine and their being branches. Obviously a branch must abide or remain in the vine to have life; death results from separation from the vine. Just so Christ is the source of the Christian's life and apart from Him one has no life at all.

Branches are wooden racks on which fruit hangs. Likewise, God's purpose for believers is fruit-bearing. To that end, by His Word He prunes branches in order that the life of the branch might be channeled toward producing fruit rather than mere wood and leaves. Answered prayer and obedience are two manifestations of fruitfulness.

Their relationship to fellow believers (verses 12-17). "Love one another as I have loved you," sums up our Lord's teaching about getting along in the family of God. He does not ask His followers to do what He has not done. As He has, we are to love sacrificially (laying down our lives), intimately (being open as friends are), with initiative (reaching out and choosing to love) and productively (giving positive help and blessing).

Their relationship to the world (verses 18-27). Christians mingling with unbelievers create a tension. People apart from Christ have a different system of beliefs, values and behavior than do His disciples. Content with error and darkness, they often feel threatened by those who pursue truth and light because righteousness spotlights sin. Christians may experience hostility if their integrity causes the worldly to feel guilty.

Think: What practices strengthen your bond to the Vine? Which ones tend to weaken the tie between you and Christ?

Pray: Lord, teach me the secret of fruitfully abiding in You.

November 25, read John 16

The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Paraclete (one called alongside to aid) and the Helper are a few of the names of the third Person of the Trinity. Of this One, Jesus said, "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (verse 7).

Who is this One? From today's portion and John 14 we learn that the Holy Spirit is always referred to as a person, not a thing; as Him, not it. It is wrong to think of Him as an impersonal force or a nebulous spook or a fleecy white cloud. He is not a mere influence but a member of the Godhead.

What is the Paraclete's ministry? He is with and in Christians forever, and He teaches them and helps them remember the words of Jesus (14:16-18, 26). Furthermore, He convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (verse 8). He guides one into truth and glorifies Christ (verses 13, 14). He is the God who works in and through Christians conforming them to our Lord's image (Philippians 2:13).

How could the Comforter's presence possibly be more profitable to believers than that of our Savior Himself? Because Jesus was with His disciples but the Spirit is in them. Because, limited by a physical body, Christ could only be in one place at any given time while the Helper is always with every believer everywhere.

When we invite Jesus Christ into our lives the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. He gives us confidence to call God our Father. He grants us power to resist temptation and live according to God's will. He prays for us. (See Romans 8.) Since no human being, no matter how hard he tries, can live the Christian life, He dwells in people to enable them to be like Jesus.

Think: Have you acknowledged the Holy Spirit within you and entrusted Him to teach, guide, convict and empower you?

Pray: Lord, thank You for the Holy Spirit who dwells in me.

November 26, read John 17

"Our Father, Who art in heaven ..." begins what we call the Lord's Prayer. In reality, that's the disciples' prayer; John 17 contains Jesus' own personal petitions to God.

First, Christ prayed for Himself (verses 1-5). His desire may be summarized in "glorify Thou Me." Throughout His ministry, He had perfectly followed His Father's will, done all He had come to do. He was about to die to fulfill the divine plan. The Son would indeed be glorified in that He would rise from death and return to heaven as victorious Sovereign.

Second, Jesus prayed for His disciples (verses 6-19). In praying aloud in their hearing, they had the joy and security of knowing that the power of the Almighty had been engaged on their behalf. As any parent separated from his or her kids might, our Lord prayed for their protection. He did not ask for their deliverance from trouble but for victory in the face of temptation and evil. To that end, their unity, oneness, sticking together was vital. He asked that they would be set apart as those who knew and lived the truth. Finally, our Savior prayed for all believers of all time (verses 20-26). For all of us who have trusted in Christ as a result of the apostles' witness in the Word, He asked perfection in unity.

Something about oneness in the church promotes belief in the world. When folks observe genuine, non-judgmental, caring love they recognize the authenticity of the gospel.

Oneness comes from knowing and trusting that God loves us as much as He loves Christ. Only the forgiven can forgive. Only the accepted can accept. Only the loved can hope to love with the unconditional, infinite love of God.

Think: How does the assurance that God loves you help you love others?

Pray: Lord, forgive me for excluding any Christian from the circle of my love.

November 27, read John 18

The hour was late. The last supper had been eaten. Judas had left to betray his Teacher. Jesus had given final instruction and encouragement to His followers. They had walked to and prayed in the garden. The end of that exhausting, emotionally overloaded day was the arrest of the Son of God.

John revealed the culmination of unbelief. Judas who had observed Christ's love and compassion nevertheless betrayed Him. Religious officials with no valid charges against Him demanded His death.

Rome's representative, Pilate, bowed to popular pressure and did not release our Lord though he found Him not guilty. Those monstrous acts weren't performed by monsters but by ordinary individuals like you and me - weak, immoral, cowardly, proud.

"John has repeatedly asserted that unbelief was due to sin ... to love of evil; the fact could not have been more clearly demonstrated than when Jesus is brought ... for trial," wrote C. R. Erdman.

The issue for Pilate and for us all is that "Every one who is of the truth hears My [Christ's] voice" (verse 37). Our Savior said this often. In John 3 He said that those who love light and truth move toward God and His Son. In John 7 He emphasized that those who are willing to live by God's will know and understand truth. Truth is not vague and elusive. Jesus made that clear when He declared, "I am the truth" (John 14:6). Like Pilate we can try smokescreening the matter because the implications are too uncomfortable. But honest truthlovers sooner or later embrace Jesus and Scripture.

Think: "If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself" (Augustine).

Pray: Lord, increase my love for truth, for Truth.

November 28, read John 19

Christ is King. That idea was blasphemy to the Jewish leaders; treason, to Rome and her officials. It's significant that Pilate asked Jesus if He was king of the Jews (18:33). Since He hadn't committed any crimes, only on that basis could Pilate justify executing Him as the mob demanded. Our Lord spoke frankly of His kingdom (18:36, 37), but obviously the Roman governor did not take Him as a serious threat. He wanted to release the Man. No pity aroused by a cruel scourging nor sense of injustice provoked by Pilate's declaration of Jesus' innocence satisfied the crowd. They demanded blood. Pilate capitulated.

Through it all, the King remained kingly. Christ displayed great dignity in the face of interrogation, mocking and beating. He, not Pilate or the mob, dominated. He said, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (verse 11). He was so in control that He gave instructions from the cross concerning His mother. He decided "It is finished!" He willfully "gave up His spirit" (verse 30).

Following His death, "Pilate wrote an inscription ... and put it on the cross ... Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews" (verse 19). Why did he do that? Maybe to irritate the Jewish leaders who had pressured him to do what he hadn't wanted to do. More likely he wrote that sign to save face with Rome. Though guilty of a horrendous miscarriage of justice, he made it look like he had put down an insurrectionist.

In the midst of dark, human depravity, the women, Joseph and Nicodemus shone. The darkness could and did not overcome the light of the King in them (1:5).

Think: Why do you think Nicodemus and Joseph "came out of the closet" after Jesus' death and not before?

Pray: Lord, my King, help me be Your loyal subject.

November 29, read John 20

In all the Easter accounts, women figure largely. They obviously loved dearly and cared deeply for they were at the tomb before anyone else. The very first persons who knew of the resurrection were women. In fact, the risen Christ appeared first to Mary Magdalene. A female. A coincidence? Not at all. "The appearances of angels and Christ Himself are deliberate acts of God. Jesus did not appear first to Peter, the 'vicar' of His church, nor even to John, the 'beloved,' " noted Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardisty.

Elaborating, V. R. Mallenkott wrote, "We must appreciate ... how truly revolutionary it was that Jesus chose women to be the first witnesses of His resurrection. Revolutionary that He should choose the sex that was barred from legal entity, barred from the temple proper, and barred from speech with men in public The modern church has failed to pay attention to what God was telling us by His choice of women as the first witnesses of the most stupendous fact in history And today. [women] are still smiled at and kidded and sometimes outright mocked when they try to tell of what God has shown them."

For many years, now, the role of women in and out of the church has been defined, discussed, debated and/or denounced. Whatever one thinks about the Equal Rights Amendment, the ordination of women, working mothers and related topics, believers must agree on one point: Jesus loved and respected women; and those who seek to follow Him should do likewise. As Karen Mains wrote, "All discussions and all final opinions about the role of women ... must be rooted firmly in ... Christ's attitude toward women."

Think: Do you listen when a person says, "I have seen the Lord" (verse 18) regardless of his/her race, sex, age or nationality?

Pray: Lord, thank You for not excluding any who come to You.

November 10, read John 2

Since Jesus always moved purposefully through life, we may say one of His reasons for leaving heaven was to attend a wedding in Cana. There He performed His first miracle or sign as John called all such events. In this Gospel, the supernatural happening was always secondary. The really important principle was what it indicated, the significant spiritual truth demonstrated about Christ. At the Galilean marriage the wine gave out. By no stretch of the imagination can one call this a life-or-death situation, but simply an embarrassing one. Does God Incarnate care about small crises like that?

Yes. Quietly, with no drumroll ta-dum, the Creator of the universe made wine from water. (As we read through this book, we'll note that nature never resisted our Lord, although human nature did.) Perhaps nobody would have even noticed had not the headwaiter made an issue of it (verses 8-10). And the wine was good. Dr. Earl Palmer notes that, "What Jesus touches He transforms." Obviously for the better.

The result was that "His disciples believed in Him" (verse 11).

Why not? In a matter of seconds they saw time compressed. Water became wine without the process of rain nurturing grapes on vines and juice fermenting. Christ produced quality without careful aging.

Since our Lord was concerned about something as minor as a couple's embarrassment, it isn't hard to imagine His attitude toward the exploitation of the poor in the temple. No wonder He cleared the moneychangers and sellers out of His Father's house.

Think: Do you ask your big God to tend to your small problems?

Pray: Lord, thank You for touching me and making me a new creature (II Corinthians 5:17).

November 11, read John 3

Nicodemus. Educated. Teacher. Ruler, Pharisee. All his life he had scrupulously adhered to the law and traditions. He wanted to be prepared for the kingdom, the rule of God in Israel. Wondering about Jesus' role in this, he visited Him.

Knowing Nicodemus' thoughts and questions, our Lord got right to the point. To participate in the kingdom of God one must be born again (verse 3). It was not a matter of adding to but of starting all over. Being a descendant of Abraham wasn't the issue, being born of the Spirit was (verse 5). Being Jewish, religious and/or spiritually informed wasn't and isn't enough.

Now this idea of being born again should not have been new to Nicodemus. John the Baptist had filled the area with a message of repentance and the need for rebirth. Nicodemus understood the concept and probably agreed it was good for Gentiles and pagans. Jesus charged, "You do not receive our witness" (verse 11). Notice He did not accuse Nicodemus of ignorance, but of unbelief.

Nicodemus did not turn Jesus down once and for all, but at that point he hesitated to accept His terms because he stood to lose so much. Faced with the responsibility of his extravagant claim (verse 2), Nicodemus backed down. He was unlike John the Baptist who declared, "He must increase but I must decrease" (verse 30).

Most people reject Christ not on intellectual or philosophical but on moral grounds. As A. W. Tozer wrote, "When we fall in love with our sin, we can imagine and manufacture 10,000 syllogisms to keep us away from the cross."

Think: If one goes to heaven, he goes God's way. Have you been born again?

Pray: Lord, I'm glad that entering Your kingdom doesn't depend on my ancestry or actions but on Your loving gift.

November 30, read John 21

The final chapter of this book seems like an afterthought. John had drawn his Gospel to a wonderful conclusion, but then he remembered more things he simply had to tell. What important points did he want to make?

1) Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were not confined to Judea. He manifested Himself to His disciples in Galilee by the sea.

2) Jesus was no mere object of wishful thinking. When He came on the scene, as He did at the lake, they usually were surprised since they weren't expecting to see Him.

3) The resurrected Lord had a body which could build fires and cook fish (verses 9, 10) as well as be touched (20:27). He could also be recognized by His acts as in providing the big catch of fish.

4) Jesus restored Peter to his place of prominence among the apostles. Earlier the two had met in what must have been an emotional time of repentance and forgiveness. Then Peter's reinstatement was witnessed in the presence of his colleagues. Peter had denied His Lord three times. So three times Jesus asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Jesus questioned whether Peter had the limitless unconditional love for Him that He Himself had just expressed for Peter and the world. We might expect Peter to make some braggadocious declaration of undying love. But he did not.

Peter had learned a bitter lesson. He knew his weakness.

Therefore, he said simply, "Yes, Lord, You know I am Your friend." He made no claim of loving with divine love as his Lord did. Still, Jesus accepted Peter where he was and gave him work to do in His cause. In doing so, He taught us that our sins once forgiven need not put us on the shelf as far as ministry is concerned.

Think: Has failure ever been a positive experience for you as it was for Peter?

Pray: Lord, thank You for accepting me as I am.

November 12, read John 4

One can hardly imagine two people more opposite. Nicodemus was a religious, intellectual, influential man. The person of John 4 was an immoral, confused, outcast woman. She, however, received Jesus' witness and led others to faith in Him (verses 39-42).

It's important to understand that Jews considered Samaritans at the bottom of the barrel of humanity. Furthermore, that Samaritan was a female; the disciples were amazed that Jesus would speak to a woman (verse 27). She was a bad Samaritan woman at that (verses 17, 18). Others would have felt justified in ignoring such a one. Jesus apparently gave no thought to what others would think or whether the woman deserved His attention. He wasn't concerned about losing His reputation for being "with it" by associating with somebody "out of it." Jesus was so secure that her sarcasm, puzzlement and evasion didn't put Him off. In fact, to a Samaritan woman He revealed first and openly that He was the Messiah promised in Scripture. And one who might have been thought the least responsive embraced Him and His message.

Good news was not only for down-and-outers, however. So when a royal official approached Jesus, He responded to that need as well. What faith was required! The nobleman had to believe before the miracle occurred. He had to take Jesus' word for it when He said, "Go ... your son lives" (verse 50). John used the word believe almost 100 times in his Gospel and always in a verbal form, perhaps because faith is active, something you do. The official showed his trust by his actions.

Think: Isn't it amazing that today some very unlikely folk are expressing faith in Christ? Does that say anything to you?

Pray: Lord, give me Your security and sensitivity to reach out to hungry people.

November 13, read John 5

Jesus' third sign was His healing of a man who had been sick 38 years. The person by Bethesda Pool had lost hope and may have been bitter, blaming others for his condition (verse 7). "Do you want to get well?" was Christ's excellent question. Perhaps the man had become comfortable receiving pity and charity and not bearing a healthy man's responsibilities. Had he lost his will to get better? Think about it. Our Lord has offered wholeness for our spiritual, emotional and relational selves. Many reject this, opting futilely to trust themselves or others. Lots of folks hate the results of their sin but not the sin itself. They willfully choose being fragmented personalities rather than committing themselves fully to God.

The sick man, obeying Jesus' one command to rise, pick up his bed and walk (verses 8, 9), stirred up a tremendous controversy. In this instance, we see that unbelief hardened into anger and hatred.

There was no rejoicing for a man's healing, but wrath because it came about on the Sabbath. Furthermore, the Jewish leadership were infuriated that Jesus claimed to be God. Note that Christ spoke of "the," "My" or "your" Father, never "our Father" in this Gospel. By this He indicated His unique relationship as the only begotten Son. His enemies weren't about to buy this.

To reject Jesus as divine, those authorities had to deny the witness of Jesus (verses 30, 31), of John the Baptist (verses 32-35), of His miracles (verse 36), of God the Father (verses 37, 38) and of Scripture (verses 39-47) which they studied but whose teaching they refused to accept. It wasn't lack of light but achingly brilliant light which blinded them.

Think: Do you ever remain fragmented rather than obey Christ's commands to love, forgive, submit, confess, trust and so on?

Pray: Lord, expose all my flimsy excuses for choosing fragmentation rather than wholeness.

November 14, read John 6

For five rolls and two little fish to feed 5,000 required an act of creation. That sign contained staggering implications. Jesus the Creator performed as did the manna-producing God of the Old Testament. But the people never really comprehended the sign; they just knew their bellies were full (verse 26). Incredibly, after the feeding they demanded a sign as a prerequisite to believing in Him (verse 30).

That the mob wanted to make Jesus king prompted a lengthy discourse. In essence our Lord said, "If you would make Me your ruler, then you had better understand who I am." Clearly Jesus told them that the manna their fathers ate in the wilderness did not prevent death but what He could give them would result in eternal life (verse 58).

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (verses 35, 48). Bread is basic; food is not a luxury but a necessity for spiritual life. Eating and drinking the flesh and blood of our Lord is a good analogy of the imperative of our union with Him (verse 56). It shouldn't have taxed the imagination of the crowd in Galilee to understand what He was saying.

Just as the Israelites accepted manna yet failed to understand and worship the Giver, so also the multitude did not recognize or believe in the God-Man behind mass feeding. Many who would have accepted Him as the Prophet (verse 14) or a king deserted Him when He made claim to divinity. In fact, "many of His disciples withdrew" (verse 66). But the apostles' faith deepened as expressed by Peter, "You have the words of eternal life ... You are the Holy One of God." The same event and message aroused a different response.

Think: Why is it that a situation which draws one person closer to Christ may drive another from Him?

Pray: Lord, thank You for filling me up, satisfying me and being all I need.

November 15, read John 7

In John 7, Jesus, the center of controversy, became the focus of real conflict. John began recounting the last six months of our Lord's life.

The occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Jesus' brothers taunted Him with the opportunity to show His stuff in Judea. "Their level of thought was, 'It pays to advertise.' The reply of Jesus showed that He regarded His career not as an opportunity for personal aggrandizement, but as a carefully planned mission" (M.C. Tenney). He would go to the feast when His Father told Him to (verse 8).

In a tense Jerusalem, some wanted to kill Jesus (verse 1). Others considered Him a good man while still others thought Him a deceiver and disrupter. Finally the topic of conversation arrived and began to teach in the temple. He said, "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (verse 17). Gripping principle! Those who aren't committed to obeying God need not bother looking for Him or His will. People who would not accept a prophet from Galilee, though the Father sent Him, (verse 52) could not possibly think right about God's will concerning the Sabbath (verses 21-24).

The final day of the feast dawned. For seven days the priests had poured water from a pitcher while singing about drawing water from the wells of salvation (Isaiah 12:3). On the eighth day, to a crowd who had observed the religious rituals, Jesus offered Himself as drink for those who were still spiritually thirsty (verses 37-39). At the end, people's opinions were the same as in the beginning and middle. And Nicodemus stood alone among the rulers in pursuing truth reasonably and fairly.

Think: Do people understand only what they want to understand?

Pray: Lord, I choose Your will whatever You may reveal it to be.

November 16, read John 8

John 8, a study in contrasts, begins with the account of the woman discovered committing adultery and ends with an encounter with self-righteous men. It shows our Lord first as His most gentle self and then as His most boldly confrontive self.

If they were truly concerned about the law, the scribes and Pharisees should have taken both adulterers to court. Instead they brought just the woman to Jesus. They hoped to show that He was soft on disobedience to the law. He did say to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go your way ... sin no more" (verse 11), but not before He had convinced the accusers of their own wickedness. Had He written in the dust a catalog of their hidden sins? In any case, what had been designed to defame Him instead brought shame on the perpetrators.

Undaunted, the Jewish rulers continued to look for indictable crimes to pin on Jesus. He saw the issue as a battle between light and darkness and between truth and error. Since He is Light (verse 12), those opposed to Him revealed that they stood firmly in league with Satan (verse 44). Physical descendants from Abraham, the Pharisees' moral ancestry was doubtful; they were in bondage to the devil and his works (verse 34).

Jesus promised them, "The truth shall make you free ... If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed" (verses 32, 36).

They, who had a history of enslavement to the Egyptians and the Assyrians and were even then under Roman domination, had the effrontery to claim, "We have never yet been enslaved to anyone" (verse 33). They were so blind they could not see light. They did however comprehend the significance of His claim to eternality and divinity (verse 58). He called Himself what God had named Himself to Moses - I AM (Exodus 3:14).

Think: Is there some bit of blindness or bondage with which you need Jesus to deal?

Pray: Lord, I want to experience the freedom of living by truth.

November 17, read John 9

In today's portion, the writer showed that the Jewish leadership's rejection of Jesus was unreasonable. In fact their irrational behavior pushed one man to declare faith in Him.

The man had been born blind. Our Lord chose to heal him in order to bring glory to God (verse 3). Even apart from obedience and trust, a person with dirt on his face will likely wash it off. In that case, the cleansing resulted in sight. _

We may be certain that Jesus healed Sundays through Fridays, but it happened that the blind man received his sight on the Sabbath. It was vastly more significant to the rulers that Jesus had made mud on Saturday than that a son of Abraham had been healed. They were more concerned with debating rather than relieving suffering. After trying to deny that a miracle had happened (verses 18-23) the leaders finally affirmed the healing (verse 24). Then instead of confronting the question of whether or not a sinner can perform such signs, they focused on whether or not a godly person would heal on the Sabbath (verse 16). Frustrated, the Pharisees harassed the man. They implied he was a liar, and then asked him to call Jesus a sinner (verse 24). They examined and cross-examined him hoping to catch him in error. Next they attacked the poor guy (verse 28) and finally excommunicated him (verses 22, 34).

There are two kinds of blindness, physical and spiritual. Jesus cured the former with greater ease than the latter in this instance. Even today He has more difficulty with those who think that they are perfect than with those who freely admit their need.

Think: How did the reaction to the man change when he ceased giving his testimony ("Once I was blind, now I see.") and began debating with Christ's detractors?

Pray: Lord, help me understand and state clearly what You've done for me.