

# *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

## *week two*

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### **Welcome to Week Two**

For those of you who are just jumping into the guide now, here are a few quick notes:

1. Brief introductions to the format of this guide and to the Gospel of John can be found at the beginning of Week One.
2. This guide can be found in various electronic forms. You can find us as a blog at [dailybibleguide.wordpress.com](http://dailybibleguide.wordpress.com) or in PDF at [bostonvineyard.org/classesprograms/leap-of-faith](http://bostonvineyard.org/classesprograms/leap-of-faith). Or, download the app.
3. *Special family-friendly materials can easily be found by looking for the red text.* These materials include three 'For you and your family' Taking It Home sections per week, and a Spiritual Practice of the Week for Families.

**Spiritual Practice of the Week for Families: Prayer.** Each time your family gathers for the Bible Guide this week, try incorporating prayer into your time. You might pray for each other, a friend, or multiple people depending on the ages and attention spans of your children. Try using the model "Sorry. Thank you. Please." one day this week: start by apologizing for anything that you feel bad about (to the person or to Jesus); then thank Jesus for something good that happened; finally, pray that Jesus would act in a situation you're concerned about. At the end of the week, think about what you liked and what you might not have liked about this particular spiritual practice. Share your thoughts with each other.

### **Monday, March 5—John 4:1-27**

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John <sup>2</sup> (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). <sup>3</sup> So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

<sup>4</sup> He had to go through Samaria on the way. <sup>5</sup> Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. <sup>7</sup> Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." <sup>8</sup> He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

<sup>9</sup> The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

<sup>11</sup> “But sir, you don’t have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? <sup>12</sup> And besides, do you think you’re greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?”

<sup>13</sup> Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. <sup>14</sup> But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

<sup>15</sup> “Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me this water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to get water.”

<sup>16</sup> “Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her.

<sup>17</sup> “I don’t have a husband,” the woman replied.

Jesus said, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—<sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!”

<sup>19</sup> “Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet. <sup>20</sup> So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?”

<sup>21</sup> Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. <sup>24</sup> For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

<sup>25</sup> The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

<sup>26</sup> Then Jesus told her, “I Am the Messiah!”

<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?”

### **Points of Interest**

- ‘though Jesus himself didn’t baptize them—his disciples did’--I did wonder yesterday why Jesus would be baptizing people in water, when John the Baptist had very clearly talked about water baptism as an inferior model that would be replaced with Jesus’ Spirit baptism (1:26,27,33). Well, apparently Jesus isn’t baptizing in water; only his disciples are. Thus far, it’s not so much that John the Baptist has been replaced as that he has been given reinforcements. Now, John the Baptist has the help of Jesus’ disciples in preparing the people for the new baptism Jesus is bringing.
- ‘So he left Judea and returned to Galilee’--Jesus is trying to turn the heat down a little. The Pharisees dislike Jesus even more than they dislike John the Baptist, and Jesus is making an even

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

bigger splash than John the Baptist. Not wanting to provoke the Pharisees too much too quickly, Jesus withdraws from their center of operations in Judea to his home territory in relatively out-of-the-way Galilee.

- ‘He had to go through Samaria’--it’s about as easy to get to Galilee from Judea without passing through Samaria as it is to get to Jamaica Plain from Allston without going through Brookline. This is a huge bummer to the Jews, because they hold an extreme dislike for the Samaritans. The Jews and the Samaritans had at one point been one nation, called Israel. In a civil war about a thousand years earlier, they broke off from one another; and they’d been feuding ever since then. The Jews hate the Samaritans in the way you can only hate someone who’s a lot like you in many ways, but just enough different from you that it galls you to no end. Basically, the Samaritans are that cousin the Jews just can’t stand.
- ‘near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph’--Jacob, also known as Israel, is the common ancestor of the Jews and Samaritans. This field and well would have been meaningful in the history of both nations.
- ‘tired from the long walk’--this is fascinating to me. Jesus is the eternal Word who made the universe, but that doesn’t stop him from getting tired and thirsty from a long walk in the hot sun.
- ‘The woman was surprised’--apparently, the Jews would do their best to hurry through Samaria without having to actually interact with any Samaritans. Jesus, however, goes out of his way to make conversation.
- ‘you would ask me, and I would give you living water’--Jesus isn’t empty-handed. In exchange for water from the well, he would give her water that could quench her soul’s thirst.
- ‘you don’t have a rope or a bucket’--once again we have this problem of someone taking Jesus’ spiritual allegories literally. Like with Nicodemus, she’s missing the point. If he were talking about the water from the well, he could just get a drink for himself, instead of trading water with her.
- ‘do you think you’re greater than our ancestor Jacob’--she’s probably trying to tweak Jesus by claiming their common ancestor. It’s like that annoying cousin pointing out how you have the exact same laugh. Jesus decides to answer her rhetorical question, with a resounding, ‘Yes.’ He out-Moseses Moses, and out-Jacobs Jacob.
- ‘I won’t have to come here to get water’--she’s still taking things too literally, but at least she’s beginning to see that Jesus is trying to offer something really good.
- ‘Go and get your husband’--this seems to come out of the blue. I wonder if Jesus is just trying to let her know that he’s not hitting on her--the first century, well-side equivalent of dropping a little side mention of your girlfriend. Or perhaps he’s bringing it up because it’s something she is ashamed of. He brings it up just to let her know that it doesn’t matter to him: ‘Yes, I know

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

you've had five husbands, and you're currently shacking up with another guy. I don't care; my offer of living water stands.'

- 'you must be a prophet'--it's getting a little uncomfortably personal for her; so she shifts the ground to a theological debate. Partially because they were cut off from the temple in Jerusalem by the division of the country and partially because they brought in the influence of neighboring countries to a greater extent, the Samaritan religion had diverged over time from the original shared faith they had with the Jews. She brings up one of the gnarliest differences between the Jews and the Samaritans. Maybe she's hoping it will be a conversation-stopper.
- 'it will no longer matter'--Jesus has something different to offer than the same old debates Jews and Samaritans have been having for countless years.
- 'I Am the Messiah!'--the disciples had figured it out for themselves. This Samaritan woman needs a little more prompting, but it's prompting Jesus is willing to give her.
- 'They were shocked to find him talking to a woman'--you just don't walk up to strange women at wells and strike up a conversation; you don't want to give people the wrong idea. Jesus manages to shock everyone. The woman is shocked because a Jew is talking to a Samaritan. The disciples are shocked because a man is talking to a woman. None of this matters to Jesus. This mountain, that mountain, Samaritan, Jew, man, woman. He's simply looking for anyone who will worship God in spirit and truth.

### **Taking It Home**

- For you: The woman at the well is not the kind of person Jesus would be expected to pay much attention to; but he does, and the conversation goes in an amazing direction. Take a moment to ask Jesus if there is an unlikely person he would like to bring to your attention. Ask God for an opportunity to talk to them, and pray that your conversation would bring something unexpected and good into that person's day.
- For your six: Jesus' decision to initiate a conversation with the woman is as shocking to her as it is to his disciples (though for different reasons). As surprised as she is by the conversation itself, I imagine that she's all the more surprised that it goes so well. Jesus offers her encouraging words, and a remarkable offer. Ask Jesus to do the same for your six. Pray that he would take them by surprise, that he would show up with good news and a good offer for whatever they need.
- For our church: Five marriages in first century Palestine isn't exactly the moral badge of honor. Jesus seems both fully aware of the woman's past and not at all bothered by it. It seems as if his hope for her far outweighs whatever challenges she has faced. Ask Jesus to give our church the same type of wholehearted, overabundant hope. Spend time thinking of the best case scenarios for all the people in our church and for our church as a whole. Then try asking Jesus for those things and thanking him for all the things that he is already doing.

*The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*  
*week two*

**Tuesday, March 6—John 4:28-42**

<sup>28</sup> The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, <sup>29</sup> “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” <sup>30</sup> So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, “Rabbi, eat something.”

<sup>32</sup> But Jesus replied, “I have a kind of food you know nothing about.”

<sup>33</sup> “Did someone bring him food while we were gone?” the disciples asked each other.

<sup>34</sup> Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. <sup>35</sup> You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. <sup>36</sup> The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! <sup>37</sup> You know the saying, ‘One plants and another harvests.’ And it’s true. <sup>38</sup> I sent you to harvest where you didn’t plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest.”

<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!” <sup>40</sup> When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, <sup>41</sup> long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. <sup>42</sup> Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.”

**Points of Interest**

- ‘left her water jar beside the well’--the water from Jacob’s well is now completely forgotten, as the worth of Jesus’ living water sinks in.
- ‘Come and see’--she makes the exact same offer to the village as Jesus had to the disciples (1:39).
- ‘a man who told me everything I ever did’--apparently her entire list of life accomplishments consists of the six men she has lived with. In any case, she apparently has a similar experience to Simon and Nathanael; she feels instantly known by Jesus in a fundamental way. It’s striking to me that she’s so happy to have her previous--perhaps not altogether seemly--life brought out into the open. It sheds new light (as it were) on Jesus’ words to Nicodemus:

All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants (3:20-21).

This woman loves the light, which means that she must in some way be one of those who ‘do what is right.’ Apparently, ‘those who do what is right,’ must mean something other than, ‘those who’ve previously been moral, upstanding citizens.’ In that way of looking at things, you’d think she’d have some things she’d want to hide. But she doesn’t hide them; she blurts them out to

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

the whole village. I wonder if Jesus' words to Nicodemus should be read something like, 'People are tempted to stay in the dark for fear that their deeds will be exposed, but those who know what they're doing will instead step into the light; that's what God really wants.' This woman knows what she's doing. She steps into the light, and far from condemnation of whatever dark deeds she's done in the past, she experiences a newly bright (or, I guess, in her case 'living water filled,' to stick with the current allegory) life.

- 'Did someone bring him food'--yep, that same thing again where Jesus speaks on a spiritual level but people take him literally. To be fair to the disciples, it's Jesus who changes the level of the conversation this time. They start by asking him if he wants lunch, and he answers by talking about the spiritually allegorical snack he just ate. Like the woman's water jar, Jesus' hunger is forgotten.
- 'My nourishment comes from doing the will of God'--Jesus is constantly trying to point beyond the surface toward a far more satisfying kind of life, available for those who will look a little harder. Why settle for mere H<sub>2</sub>O when the source of something that will eternally refresh your soul is right in front of you? Why fix your attention on a sandwich when you could instead be fed by the experience of working side by side with God? Yesterday's passage points out that Jesus is, in fact, thirsty (and presumably hungry), but he completely forgets his physical hunger and thirst in light of the far better spiritual satisfaction he has just experienced.
- 'Four months between planting and harvest'--Jesus is quoting some everyday proverbs here, not the Bible. This one seems to be about delayed gratification: it takes some time for hard work to pay off. Not in this case, Jesus says. There's immediate, big bang for the buck.
- 'One plants and another harvests'--this next proverb, however, proves true in this case. I get the impression that this one might be a bit cynical in its normal usage: I do the work, but someone else cashes the paycheck. Perhaps only because the disciples are the 'harvesters,' it has a happier application here: the hard work is done; all you have to do is pick up the profits.
- 'I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant'--it's unclear to me who the planters are, or when the sending occurred. Are the planters perhaps the ancient prophets? Maybe the sending is when they were baptizing people? The most proximate sending is when Jesus sends them into the village to buy groceries. Did Jesus expect them to have had similar experiences to the one he had with the woman? Maybe he's disappointed or, even more, confused by the fact that they come back only with a few bags of food. The woman, on the other hand, takes in quite a 'harvest' of people interested in hearing more from Jesus.
- 'he stayed for two days'--this village starts out as a place they were forced to pass through. It becomes a weekend destination.

### **Taking It Home**

- For you: I wonder if working side by side with God is so nourishing to Jesus because he is doing exactly what he was created to do. Have there been times in your life when you felt like you

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

were working side by side with God? Or times when you felt like “This! This is what I was created to do!”. What was it like? Was it as life-giving as Jesus describes? Ask God for opportunities that feel deeply nourishing to you--things that you feel like only you were created to do.

- For your six: Ask Jesus to make it easy for your six to talk about things at a spiritual level. Pray that Jesus would take conversations beyond just the everyday chatter to the deeper things that matter most to them.
- For our church: Yesterday we mentioned the unlikeliness of Jesus interacting with the woman. I think it’s even more unexpected that Jesus and the disciples would stay in Samaria, and yet again that all sorts of people would start believing in him. Even the disciples seem to overlook the harvest in Samaria, writing the entire people group off from God’s attention. Ask God to make our church a place where the most unlikely candidates would find Jesus.

### **Wednesday, March 7—John 4:43-54**

<sup>43</sup> At the end of the two days, Jesus went on to Galilee. <sup>44</sup> He himself had said that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. <sup>45</sup> Yet the Galileans welcomed him, for they had been in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration and had seen everything he did there.

<sup>46</sup> As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die.

<sup>48</sup> Jesus asked, “Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?”

<sup>49</sup> The official pleaded, “Lord, please come now before my little boy dies.”

<sup>50</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Go back home. Your son will live!” And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.

<sup>51</sup> While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. <sup>52</sup> He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, “Yesterday afternoon at one o’clock his fever suddenly disappeared!” <sup>53</sup> Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” And he and his entire household believed in Jesus. <sup>54</sup> This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.

### **Points of Interest**

- ‘He himself had said’--not in John’s gospel. He does say this in Mark (6:4) and Matthew (13:57). Maybe this is another indicator that John assumes knowledge of the other gospels. At the very least, it’s pretty clear that John is not terribly interested in telling us the details of Jesus’ teaching and actions in the order in which they occur. Instead he brings them up, sometimes in sort of an offhanded way, as they become relevant to him.

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

- ‘Yet the Galileans welcomed him’--in this case, the ‘harvest’ surprises even Jesus.
- ‘Will you never believe in me’--once again, Jesus and the other person are operating on different planes. This time around, I have a hard time figuring out where Jesus is coming from, and an even harder time sympathizing with him. He seems to be taking the man’s request as some sort of test, but all I see is a desperate father with a sick child. Can’t Jesus abandon his ultra-spiritual perspective for just a minute and simply help the guy out? I find myself wishing that Jesus (as portrayed by John) would just play it straight for once.

Moving on from my impatience (thanks for letting me have my little moment, by the way), I see a couple of different possibilities, neither of which gives me an entirely comfortable resting spot, but each of which has some attraction:

- a. Jesus is disappointed because people continue to settle for what is, to his mind, small change. To him, the healing and the changing of water into wine and so forth are simply teasers, a small taste of what he really has to offer them: a totally new and different experience of life. Again and again, people stop at the teaser. It’s like they enjoy the trailer but don’t ever watch the movie. I could understand Jesus’ exasperation that people aren’t getting it, but a dying boy seems like a poor occasion for expressing that exasperation.
  - b. It’s the begging that bothers Jesus. He’s not annoyed about the healing; he’s hurt because the father thinks he needs to cajole Jesus into it. ‘Of course, I want to heal your boy.’ I like this hypothesis because it means that Jesus is not somehow put out by the prospect of saving a dying child. But if this is what’s going on, it seems like Jesus is overreacting a bit. He could get his point across more graciously.
- ‘the man believed what Jesus said’--Jesus’ complaint, if we take it precisely, is that people aren’t believing until they see. So, maybe what bothers Jesus about the father’s request is the father’s insistence that Jesus must come in person to the bedside. As it turns out, the father believes before seeing; he takes Jesus at his word without any visible proof, and finds out later that things happened just as Jesus had said.
  - ‘This was the second miraculous sign’--John calls both of the miracles he actually describes in detail ‘signs.’ The significance of a sign is not in itself, but in the thing it points to. For example, a Starbucks sign is good news for someone who wants coffee, but only because it directs you to a coffeehouse. Without the coffeehouse, the sign is no good. The miracles John tells us about are meant to turn our attention beyond themselves. In this case, a son on his death bed gets up again, alive and well. I guess this is a sign of what will happen to Jesus: when it looks like he’s dead, don’t worry; the Son will live. Maybe this is why it’s so important to Jesus that they believe before seeing.

### **Taking It Home**

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide* week two

- For you and your family: Even in very difficult circumstances, the officer believed Jesus' words that his son would be healed. What things do you find hard to believe that Jesus said or did? Pray together for faith in Jesus' words, even in the most difficult circumstances.
- For your six: Pray today for any of your six or your six's family members who are in dire physical condition. Ask Jesus to heal them.
- For our church: Spend some time thanking Jesus for all of the miraculous signs he has shown to our church over the years. Thank Jesus for his willingness to give us these signs of his power and goodness, and pray that our faith would be increased by them.

### Thursday, March 8—John 5:1-18

<sup>1</sup> Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. <sup>2</sup> Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. <sup>3</sup> Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. <sup>5</sup> One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?”

<sup>7</sup> “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.”

<sup>8</sup> Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!”

<sup>9</sup> Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, <sup>10</sup> so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!”

<sup>11</sup> But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

<sup>12</sup> “Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded.

<sup>13</sup> The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. <sup>14</sup> But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” <sup>15</sup> Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

<sup>16</sup> So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. <sup>17</sup> But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” <sup>18</sup> So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

### Points of Interest

- ‘Crowds of sick people lay on the porches’--apparently, like the springs in Bath, England, or Hot Springs, Arkansas, or Spa, Belgium, or numerous other places, this pool is known for its (real or imagined) therapeutic properties. It seems people think the water is particularly beneficial when the spring is bubbling.

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

- ‘Would you like to get well?’--it sounds like a silly question. Of course, he’d rather be well than sick. Perhaps there’s more to the question than originally appears, though. The man doesn’t actually answer Jesus’ question: Jesus asks what the man wants; the man answers about what he thinks is possible. The man has no expectation of actually ever getting better. It makes me wonder why he would bother to go to the pool day after day. Does he still try to jump in the pool when it bubbles, only to fail every time, or did he stop making the effort somewhere along the line? It hasn’t really mattered one way or the other up until now. He’s right; whether or not he’s wanted to be well, he couldn’t be.
- ‘I have no one to put me into the pool’--is the man hoping that Jesus will offer to help him into the pool? The man has built up an explanation of why he is sick; it’s because he can never manage to be the first in. Imagine how disappointing it would be to somehow, beyond hope, manage one day to get into the pool first, only to find yourself sick still. Thankfully, Jesus has more to offer than that. The man doesn’t need to get into the pool. He can just get up and walk.
- ‘You can’t work on the Sabbath!’--the Sabbath is the weekly day of rest prescribed by Moses. This situation reminds me again of 1:17: ‘the law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.’ The law has nothing to offer this man here; he’s had thirty-eight years of forced ‘rest.’
- ‘The man who healed me told me, “Pick up your mat and walk”’--no offense to them, but doing what this man told him to do has actually helped him. He’s going to do what this guy recommends, even if it doesn’t exactly fit in the rules.
- ‘so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you’--it may be hard for this man to imagine, but Jesus thinks there are even worse things than being sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus would hate to heal the man’s body, only to see his soul die. I don’t know exactly why Jesus considers it so urgent to warn this man to stop sinning. What sin is he in such immediate danger of being seriously harmed by? One thing that seems pretty certain is that, once again as with the Samaritan woman, it’s not being a better rule-follower that Jesus has in mind. Jesus himself has just actively encouraged this man to break one of the Ten Big Rules (the sabbath being one of the Ten Commandments).
- ‘tried all the harder to find a way to kill him’--I get the feeling that the ‘something worse’ Jesus is warning about has already happened to the leaders. Something has to have gone very wrong in someone’s life if, in the name of God, they try to stop one man being healed and they try to kill another one, all over a mat being carried.
- ‘thereby making himself equal with God’--children are always of the same species as their parents. If God is Jesus’ Father, and God’s species is ‘God,’ then so is Jesus’. The Jewish leaders consider such a claim blasphemous.

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

#### **Taking It Home**

- **For you and your family:** The crippled man in this passage blames others for not putting him in the healing waters--for 38 years! He gets so wrapped up in how others have let him down and in his bad circumstances that he almost doesn't notice the amazing offer of help Jesus gives him. When do you let blaming others or complaining about what has happened take all of your attention? Ask Jesus to give you a way to move out of both your bad circumstances and your bad mood, and pray that blaming and complaining won't get in the way.
- **For your six:** As we discuss above, it may be the case that the man at the pool gets a little too wrapped up in blaming others for his illness. Then again, he has in fact been desperate and alone for a long time. His words, 'I have noone who can help me,' are somewhat striking. Pray today about the ways that your six have the same sense of helplessness. If there are any ways that your six feel doomed in their current situation, ask Jesus to pull them out like he did for this man.
- **For our church:** Being in Jerusalem for the Jewish Holy Days was probably somewhat similar to being at the mall three days before Christmas; it wasn't exactly a moment for thoughtful reflection. I love that in the hustle and bustle of all of the holiday activity, Jesus takes notice of one man among the crowds and sees that God might have something to offer him. Ask God to give our church the ability to slow down and see what God is doing. Pray that we wouldn't overlook how God is working because we are too consumed with all of the busyness that surrounds us.

#### **Friday, March 9—John 5:19-47**

<sup>19</sup> So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. <sup>21</sup> For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants. <sup>22</sup> In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, <sup>23</sup> so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.

<sup>24</sup> "I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

<sup>25</sup> "And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it's here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. <sup>26</sup> The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. <sup>27</sup> And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, <sup>29</sup> and they will rise again. Those who have done good will

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment.<sup>30</sup> I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will.

<sup>31</sup> “If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid.<sup>32</sup> But someone else is also testifying about me, and I assure you that everything he says about me is true.<sup>33</sup> In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist, and his testimony about me was true.<sup>34</sup> Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved.<sup>35</sup> John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message.<sup>36</sup> But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me.<sup>37</sup> And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face,<sup>38</sup> and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you.

<sup>39</sup> “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!<sup>40</sup> Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

<sup>41</sup> “Your approval means nothing to me,<sup>42</sup> because I know you don’t have God’s love within you.<sup>43</sup> For I have come to you in my Father’s name, and you have rejected me. Yet if others come in their own name, you gladly welcome them.<sup>44</sup> No wonder you can’t believe! For you gladly honor each other, but you don’t care about the honor that comes from the one who alone is God.

<sup>45</sup> “Yet it isn’t I who will accuse you before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, in whom you put your hopes.<sup>46</sup> If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me.<sup>47</sup> But since you don’t believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

### **Points of Interest**

- ‘the Son can do nothing by himself’--in today’s passage, Jesus is addressing the leaders’ outrage at Jesus claiming to be God’s close relative. I think we can basically sum up his answer as something like, ‘What’s the big deal?’ or, ‘Get used to it.’ Jesus points out that if they reject his claim to be God’s Son, they have to explain somehow the fact that he has just performed a miracle. ‘If God didn’t want me to heal on the Sabbath, I couldn’t have.’
- ‘Whatever the Father does, the Son also does’--far from going against God’s wishes, Jesus is simply doing what he has seen God do, just like children imitate their parents. Like Father, like Son.
- ‘will show him how to do even greater works’--does this mean that Jesus is still learning? He’s been watching his Father, and doing as his Father does; but he hasn’t picked everything up yet. This reminds me of what Jesus says to Nathanael: ‘Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this’ (1:50). People are very impressed by the things Jesus has been doing, but he’s just getting started. So far, he’s just put up some signs; he hasn’t even gotten to the real work yet.

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

- ‘just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead’--here’s the greater thing: raising the dead. And Jesus can’t do it yet, because he hasn’t seen the Father do it yet. The Father will practice on him, and then he’ll turn around and do it for others.
- ‘is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him’--in general, you don’t gain points with a father by questioning whether the child is actually his. The leaders are mistaken if they think their suspicion of Jesus is putting them on God’s good side.
- ‘I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it’s here now’--which is it? Is it coming, or here? Or perhaps the time arrived right in the middle of the sentence. I’m perhaps a little lost.
- ‘when the dead will hear my voice’--given Jesus’ tendency to speak on a spiritual level in John’s gospel, I’m assuming he is speaking metaphorically here. But seeing how easy it is for people to misunderstand Jesus in John’s gospel makes me hold that opinion lightly.
- ‘he has given him authority to judge everyone’--Jesus told Nicodemus that God did not send him to judge, but to save (3:17). Here, though, he is given broad authority to judge. Then again, it seems that even here his primary intention is to give overflowing life, not to execute judgement. Perhaps the authority to judge is something God has given Jesus in case of emergency. Like a police officer with his gun, Jesus is warning the leaders, ‘Don’t make me use this.’ He’ll judge if he has to.
- ‘the Scriptures point to me’--the Bible (‘scriptures’ here) is also just a sign, not the thing itself. These leaders are very attached to studying the Bible. But the act of studying the Bible is not, on its own, going to get them the good life. They must actually pay attention to where the Bible is trying to point them.
- ‘Your approval means nothing to me’--Jesus is not explaining himself here because he needs their endorsement. He’s explaining himself to give them a chance to turn around before they end up with judgement and death instead of eternal life.

### **Taking It Home**

- For you: Does all this talk about life, the dead and judging seem a little hard to make sense of? I’m not quite sure how it all pans out after life on planet earth, but what does seem to be clear is that Jesus has a lot of life he wants to offer. Ask Jesus what the life is that he is offering you today? Talk to him particularly about any of the things going on that seem to be especially lacking vitality. Ask him to show you where the life is in those circumstances.
- For your six: Jesus’ audience refuses to come to him even though they are aware he probably has what they are looking for. Pray today about whatever reasons your six have for refusing to engage with Jesus. Ask him to give them soft hearts and an openness to receiving what he is offering them.
- For our church: Jesus’ MO is simply to watch for what God is doing and then do the same. Ask God to help our church embrace the same strategy in everything we do. Ask Jesus to help us

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide* week two

only do what we see him doing. Pray we would get really good at listening to and watching him instead of just relying on our own plans, ambitions and time-lines.

### **Saturday, March 10—John 6:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup> A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. <sup>3</sup> Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. <sup>4</sup> (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) <sup>5</sup> Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?” <sup>6</sup> He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

<sup>7</sup> Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!”

<sup>8</sup> Then Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up. <sup>9</sup> “There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?”

<sup>10</sup> “Tell everyone to sit down,” Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) <sup>11</sup> Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.” <sup>13</sup> So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

<sup>14</sup> When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” <sup>15</sup> When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.

<sup>16</sup> That evening Jesus’ disciples went down to the shore to wait for him. <sup>17</sup> But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn’t come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum. <sup>18</sup> Soon a gale swept down upon them, and the sea grew very rough. <sup>19</sup> They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, <sup>20</sup> but he called out to them, “Don’t be afraid. I am here!” <sup>21</sup> Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!

### **Points of Interest**

- ‘also known as the Sea of Tiberias’--as I mentioned previously, Galilee has a mixed population of Jews and non-Jews--well, not exactly mixed; they mostly lived in separate towns. Tiberias is the predominately non-Jewish capital city (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980. ‘Tiberias’). I think Sea of Tiberias must be the non-Jewish name for the Sea of Galilee. Maybe John uses it here because it would be more recognizable to his readers. He could also be using the non-Jewish name because by crossing over the sea Jesus enters non-Jewish territory. Nonetheless, from their knowledge of the Jewish prophets we can assume that

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

the audience is a Jewish one. Apparently, a large number of Jews has followed Jesus to a non-Jewish neighborhood.

- ‘It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration’--John is framing the meal that is about to happen as a new kind of Passover meal.
- ‘He was testing Philip’--Jesus isn’t genuinely confused and turning to Philip for help. Jesus has a plan; he’s just curious what Philip would say about the situation.
- ‘they all sat down on the grassy slopes’--it sounds like the people are being taken care of very well. They’re comfortable, and well-fed.
- ‘filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves’--there’s such an abundance that, far beyond having more food left than they eat, they actually have more food left than they start with.
- ‘Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!’--as with John (1:21), they’re referring to the ‘Prophet like Moses’ (Deuteronomy 18:15). They’re so certain that Jesus is the Prophet Like Moses because this multiplication of bread reminds them of one of Moses’ big miracles; while the Israelites were wandering with Moses in the desert for forty years, God fed them every day with a miracle bread called ‘Manna’ (which means, ‘What the ....!’). (I’m embarrassed to say that I didn’t catch the manna reference myself. I’m grateful to the *IVP Bible Background Commentary* for pointing it out).
- ‘they were ready to force him to be their king’--this reminds me of Jesus telling his mother, ‘That’s not our problem. My time has not yet come’ (2:4). Jesus let his mother nudge him into performing a miracle; this time, he slips out. He has his own plan and his own sense of timing.
- ‘they got into the boat’--I’m a little surprised that they just leave Jesus. Perhaps it had been prearranged: ‘If I’m not back by dark, go on without me.’
- ‘Don’t be afraid. I am here’--already exhausted by the storm, they are then a little freaked out to see some sort of ghost coming at them over the water. It turns out to be Jesus, who seems to be treating it like the most normal experience in the world: ‘Calm down. It’s me. I’m sorry I was late.’
- ‘immediately they arrived at their destination’--I don’t really have much to say about this one but, ‘Cool.’

### **Taking It Home**

- For you and your family: Put yourself in Peter or Andrew’s place in this story. You’re in a situation bigger than yourself, and there’s a need that you don’t know how to fill. Can you offer Jesus what you have and trust him to make it into more? Try this with a situation that you’re really facing.

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

- For your six: Jesus is abundantly generous in how he provides for his followers. Ask Jesus to generously provide for your six. Ask Jesus if there is a way that he would like to you to be abundantly gracious with one of your six.
- For our church: I can't help but notice that after Jesus somehow provides more than enough food for a small village's worth of people, no one stops to say, 'Thanks that was really great'. Maybe someone did but John forgot to mention it, or maybe I'm just more selfish than Jesus and would want at least one person to notice what I did. Or maybe Jesus also thinks that a thank-you would have been nice. Instead, everybody moves immediately on to deciding the next thing that they would like Jesus to do for them. Spend time today thanking God. Thank Jesus for whatever good he has done for you today, and consider particularly thinking to thank God for our church. If there is something specific about our church that you are grateful for, tell someone.

### **Sunday, March 11—John 6:22-40**

<sup>22</sup> The next day the crowd that had stayed on the far shore saw that the disciples had taken the only boat, and they realized Jesus had not gone with them. <sup>23</sup> Several boats from Tiberias landed near place where the Lord had blessed the bread and the people had eaten. <sup>24</sup> So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him. <sup>25</sup> They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. <sup>27</sup> But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."

<sup>28</sup> They replied, "We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus told them, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent."

<sup>30</sup> They answered, "Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? <sup>31</sup> After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup> "Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day."

<sup>35</sup> Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup> But you haven't believed in me even though you have seen me. <sup>37</sup> However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. <sup>39</sup> And this is

## *The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*

### *week two*

the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. <sup>40</sup> For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day."

#### **Points of Interest**

- 'went across to Capernaum to look for him'--they aren't giving up on this idea of making him king. They commandeered some boats and follow him.
- 'not because you understood the miraculous signs'--it might look an awful lot like they understood the sign, seeing how energetically they follow him; but they don't really. If I understand the sign correctly, it's rather like the message he gave the Samaritan woman. To the woman, he said, 'Don't settle for water that will just leave you thirsty again. Ask me, and I'll give you a new kind of water that truly satisfies.' To this crowd, I think his point is, 'Bread is too easy. I can make that for you out of nothing anytime. Look to me for eternal life instead.' They do indeed keep following after him, but Jesus has the suspicion that they're still just hungering for things that will make them hungry again.
- 'Believe in the one he has sent'--here's Jesus' interpretation of the sign: I'm the bread; I can feed you in a way actual bread never could.
- 'What can you do?'--well, he has just fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread, and walked across a lake. They're just addicted to free bread and spectacle. They only want the signs, not the things they point to.
- 'My Father did'--he's not going to get into a competition with Moses. And it's not about Moses anyway. God fed their ancestors manna in the desert, and God is trying to feed them an even better miracle bread now.
- 'those the Father has given me will come to me'--Jesus knows that he can't force anyone to read the signs. Whoever does in fact read the signs, that's who he is talking to.
- 'I will raise them up at the last day'--the last day is the end of the world. I think that for each of us 'the last day,' effectively speaking, is also the last day of our lives. Whenever these people and the world part ways, either because the world ends or because their lives do, things only get better for them; they get lifted higher, rather than falling down.

#### **Taking It Home**

- For you: Jesus seems to make a big deal about people's responses to him. It doesn't seem like he cares about much more than, Do you believe me? Do you trust me? Tell Jesus how you feel about him. If you trust Jesus, tell him so. If you have questions, ask him those as well. Try picturing yourself with Jesus. How do you picture him? How do you respond to him? Look for ways during your day to remind yourself about Jesus.
- For your six: It's clear the crowds have some interest in who Jesus actually is. He's like a popular author who they'll trek around the city to hear speak. However, they still kind of want to keep

*The Good News according to John—a daily Bible guide*  
*week two*

at arm's distance. Ask God to bless whatever interest you have in him. Pray that they wouldn't keep Jesus at an arm's distance but would embrace him.

- For our church: Even though the crowds in the end don't entirely get what Jesus is about, there are still CROWDS of people who are coming from every corner to see Jesus for themselves. Ask God to make our church a place that attracts crowds and crowds to come and experience Jesus with us. Pray that there would be a buzz that draws people from all different backgrounds to our church to connect with Jesus.