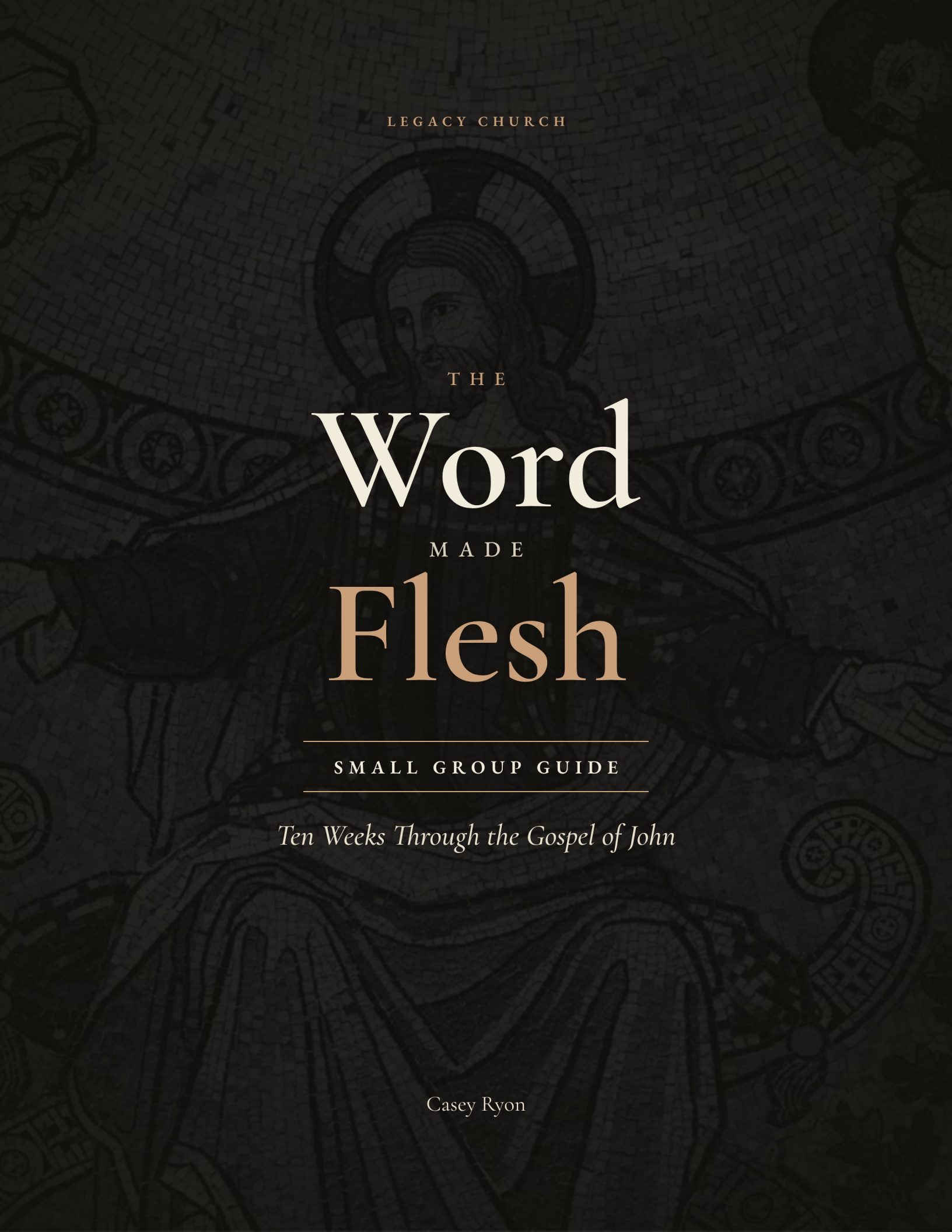

LEGACY CHURCH

THE Word MADE Flesh

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Ten Weeks Through the Gospel of John

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TEN SESSIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Before You Begin

John tells us exactly why he wrote his Gospel: "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). He is not only giving us information about Jesus. He is introducing us to a Person and inviting us to trust Him.

This guide walks through the whole Gospel in ten sessions. No ten week study can cover every verse of John, so each session takes one central passage and lets it open up the chapters around it. Read the wider chapters during the week and you will have read the entire book by the end.

The thread to follow

John builds his Gospel around signs and sayings that answer one question: who is Jesus? Watch for the seven "I am" statements, for the word "believe," and for the way people respond to Him. Nearly every scene ends with someone moving toward Jesus in faith or away from Him in unbelief. No one stays where they were.

How to use this guide

Each session is built to fill about an hour with a group.

1. **Read** the passage out loud from your own Bible. This guide quotes the ESV.
2. **Open** with the warm-up question. It is meant to be easy.
3. **Study** the notes together. Read them aloud or summarize them.
4. **Discuss** the questions. You do not need to reach all of them.
5. **Practice** one thing before you meet again.
6. **Pray** for one another before you leave.

SESSION ONE

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:1–18

Read this week: John 1

Jesus is not part of the story. He is the Author who stepped into it.

WARM UP

If you could sit down with any person from history for an hour, who would it be and why?

STUDY

In the beginning (vv. 1–5). John does not start with a manger, a miracle, or even a man. He starts with eternity. Before there was light, time, or breath, there was Jesus. Not an idea, not a force, not a philosophy. A Person, who was with God and who was God. He is not a new character introduced midway through the Bible. He is the author from page one. In calling Him "the Word," John answers two longings at once. The Jews longed for the God who speaks. The Greeks searched for the logic that holds the universe together. John says it is Jesus. He is what you have been looking for.

A witness to the light (vv. 6–13). John the Baptist knew who he was and who he was not. "He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light." The light came to His own people, and many did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, "he gave the right to become children of God." That is not something we are born into or achieve. It is given.

The Word became flesh (vv. 14–18). This is one of the most astonishing claims of the Christian faith. The voice that spoke the universe into being put on flesh "and dwelt among us." He hungered. He wept. He bled. He felt betrayal, loneliness, and grief. He did not skip the hard parts of life. He entered them willingly.

That matters more than we realize, because it means you do not have to be afraid of Him. Many people carry shame, avoid prayer, and hide from God as if He would not understand. But He has been here. And "no one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus.

The One who was there at the beginning of all things is also the One who offers you a new beginning. Not only once, on the day you first believed, but again and again.

WORD TO KNOW

Word (*logos*): word, reason, message. The self-expression of God. Jesus is everything God wanted to say, in a Person.

DISCUSS

i. What difference does it make that Jesus is eternal and not simply a great teacher who came along later?

ii. John the Baptist was clear about who he was not. Where are you tempted to be the light instead of pointing to it?

iii. How does it change your prayers to know that God "became flesh" and has felt what you feel?

iv. Do you tend to hide from God when you fail? What would it look like to come close without fear?

v. Where do you need a new beginning right now?

PRACTICE

Read John 1 slowly this week. Each day, finish this sentence in prayer: "Jesus, because You became flesh, I can bring You..."

PRAY

Thank God that He made Himself known. Ask Him to help you see Jesus clearly over these ten weeks.

SESSION TWO

Come and See

John 1:35–51 and 2:1–11

Read this week: John 1:19–2:25

Following Jesus begins with an invitation, and people who have met Him bring others.

WARM UP

Who first invited you to something that ended up changing your life?

STUDY

Behold the Lamb (1:29, 35–39). John the Baptist could have said, "Behold the King," or "Behold the Judge." He said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Everyone listening knew what lambs were for. The story of Israel was full of them, offered at the altar for sin. John points at a Person and says, this is the One all of that was pointing to. Two of his disciples hear it and follow Jesus, who turns and says, "Come and you will see."

Disciples bring people (1:40–46). Andrew had been a disciple for less than a day when he went to find his brother. He had no training and no prepared arguments. He had met the Messiah, and that was enough. This is one of the simplest truths about discipleship: the Christian life is not meant to be hoarded. Philip does the same with Nathanael, and when Nathanael objects, Philip does not argue. He says, "Come and see." Bringing someone to Jesus does not always look like a sermon. Often it is an invitation.

Follow me (1:43). It is one of the shortest calls in Scripture and one of the hardest to live. We like to treat faith as something we add to our lives while keeping control of the steering wheel. But Jesus does not invite us to walk beside Him as equals. He calls us to follow Him as Lord, which means His Word sets the direction.

The first sign (2:1–11). At a wedding in Cana, the wine runs out. In that culture it was a public humiliation for the family. Jesus's first miracle is not a display of power for a crowd. It is a quiet act of mercy that spares a family from shame. He fills six stone jars used for ritual washing with the best wine of the feast. The master of the feast is puzzled: everyone serves the good wine first, but "you have kept the good wine until now." With Jesus, the best is always still ahead. John says this sign "manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

WORD TO KNOW

Sign (*sēmeion*): John's word for a miracle. A sign is not the point. It points beyond itself to who Jesus is.

DISCUSS

i. Why do you think John the Baptist chose the title "Lamb of God"? What does it tell you about why Jesus came?

ii. Andrew brought Peter. Who brought you? Who is your "Peter"?

iii. Why is "Come and see" often more effective than winning an argument?

iv. Where are you following Jesus, and where are you asking Him to follow you?

v. What does the miracle at Cana show you about the heart of Jesus?

vi. Do you live as though the best is behind you, or still ahead?

PRACTICE

Invite one person this week to "come and see": to a meal, to your group, or to church with you.

PRAY

Pray by name for the people you want to bring to Jesus.

SESSION THREE

You Must Be Born Again

John 3:1–21

Read this week: John 3

What we need is not improvement. It is new life, and it comes by looking to the Son who was lifted up.

WARM UP

Have you ever been an expert at something and still discovered you had missed the most important part?

STUDY

The man who had it all (vv. 1–3). Nicodemus was everything his world said a godly man should be. A Pharisee, a teacher of Israel, a ruler of the Jews. Respected, educated, devout. By every human standard he was right with God. Yet something was still missing, and no title or ritual could quiet it. So he comes to Jesus at night with compliments and questions. Jesus cuts straight through: "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

When knowledge outpaces humility (vv. 4–10). Nicodemus had spent his life mastering the Scriptures, and when the Author stood in front of him, he was confused. The issue was not intelligence. It was humility. The kingdom is not unlocked by the learned or the powerful but by those willing to be made new. The same danger follows us as we grow. Knowledge and maturity can slowly turn into pride. True maturity never outgrows grace. The moment we stop being amazed by it, something has gone wrong.

Lifted up (vv. 14–15). Jesus reaches back to Numbers 21. When Israel was dying from serpent bites in the wilderness, God told Moses to lift a bronze serpent on a pole. Anyone who looked at it in faith lived. It made no logical sense. It simply required believing God enough to look. Jesus says that story was about Him. "So must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." The cure for sin would come through His death.

For God so loved the world (vv. 16–21). God did not send His Son to condemn the world but to save it. Yet a verdict is already in: "the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light." The question is whether we will come into the light or keep hiding from it.

The chapter ends with John the Baptist watching his own crowds shrink as Jesus's grow, and rejoicing: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30).

WORD TO KNOW

Born again (*gennaō anōthen*): the word can mean "again" or "from above." Both are true. This is a birth only God can give.

DISCUSS

i. Nicodemus had religion, respect, and knowledge. Why was that not enough?

ii. In what ways can spiritual maturity quietly become pride?

iii. What does the bronze serpent teach us about how salvation works?

iv. Why do people love darkness? Where are you tempted to stay out of the light?

v. Can you point to evidence of new life in yourself? What has changed?

vi. What would "He must increase, but I must decrease" look like in your work, home, or ministry?

PRACTICE

Write out John 3:16–17 and put your own name in place of "the world." Read it every morning this week.

PRAY

Thank God for new birth. Pray for anyone in your life who is religious but not yet reborn.

SESSION FOUR

Living Water

John 4:1–42

Read this week: John 4–5

Jesus meets us at the place of our shame and offers the only thing that satisfies.

WARM UP

What is something you kept going back to, expecting it to satisfy, that never quite did?

STUDY

The woman at the well (vv. 1–9). No one fetched water at noon. The women of the town came in the cool of the morning. This woman came alone, at the hottest part of the day, because she did not want to be seen. And that is where Jesus meets her. Not in the temple or the synagogue, but at the well of her daily need. He asks her for a drink, breaking the rules of His day. Jewish men did not speak with Samaritan women. Jesus does not honor those divisions. He walks through them. Before she could ask for living water, He was already there waiting.

Living water (vv. 10–15). Every person is thirsty for something. We drink from success, relationships, pleasure, and approval, and the thirst always returns. Jesus offers what no earthly well can give: "whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." It becomes "a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The truth comes out (vv. 16–26). "Go, call your husband." It sounds like a simple request, and it exposes the wound she is hiding. Jesus already knows. He names her past not to shame her but to heal her. He tells the truth, and He tells it with compassion. That is how He still deals with us. He confronts your past so He can redeem your future. When she changes the subject to where people ought to worship, He tells her the Father is seeking those who will worship "in spirit and truth." Then He tells this outcast what He has told almost no one: "I who speak to you am he."

The testimony of the thirsty (vv. 27–42). She leaves her water jar. The thing she came to fill, she forgets, because what Jesus gave her was greater. The woman who avoided people now runs to find them: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." Shame has turned into boldness. Many in the town believe because of her word, and then say, "we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

WORD TO KNOW

Living water: in everyday speech, fresh running water as opposed to a cistern. Jesus uses it for the life of the Spirit given to those who believe (John 7:37–39).

DISCUSS

i. Why do you think Jesus went to this woman, at this well, at this hour?

ii. What "wells" do you return to that never satisfy for long?

iii. How does Jesus handle her sin? What can we learn about telling the truth with compassion?

iv. When truth gets close, she changes the subject. How do you deflect when God puts His finger on something?

v. What does it mean to worship in both spirit and truth? Which do you lean toward?

vi. She had been a believer for minutes when she told her town. What keeps you from doing the same?

PRACTICE

Name one well you keep returning to. Each time you reach for it this week, stop and ask Jesus for living water first.

PRAY

Bring Him your real thirst. Ask Him to satisfy you with Himself.

SESSION FIVE

The Bread of Life

John 6:25–40 and 6:60–69

Read this week: John 6–7

Jesus did not come to give us what we want. He came to give us Himself, and He is enough.

WARM UP

What is the best meal you have ever eaten? How long before you were hungry again?

STUDY

Bread that perishes (vv. 25–29). The day before, Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Now the crowd crosses the sea to find Him, and He exposes their motive. They did not come because the sign pointed to the Savior. They came because the bread filled their stomachs. He does not shame their hunger. He redirects it: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life."

They respond with the reflex of every religious heart: what must we do? Jesus answers, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." Faith is not spiritual laziness. It is the surrender of saving yourself. It is refusing to trust your track record and resting entirely on His.

I am the bread of life (vv. 30–40). Israel ate manna in the wilderness. It kept them alive for a day, and the next morning they had to gather it again. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." He is not offering spiritual improvement. He is offering Himself. And He adds a promise for every anxious heart: "whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

When Jesus offends (vv. 60–66). At the height of His popularity, Jesus preaches His hardest message, and the crowd leaves. The miracle worker they loved becomes the teacher they cannot tolerate. He does not panic, and He does not soften the message to keep them. Jesus has never been impressed by numbers. He would rather have a few hearts fully surrendered than a multitude half awake.

Where else could we go? (vv. 67–69). He turns to the twelve: "Do you want to go away as well?" Peter's answer is not polished, but it is perfect: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." That is the anchor of faith. We have considered the alternatives and found them empty. And notice the order: "we have believed, and have come to know." Trust comes first, and over time it is confirmed.

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *I am* (*egō eimi*): the first of seven "I am" statements in John. Each one echoes the name God gave Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14).

DISCUSS

i. Why do you follow Jesus? Be honest about how much is for what He gives and how much is for who He is.

ii. Why is "believe" so hard for people who want something to do?

iii. What is the difference between Jesus improving your life and Jesus being your life?

iv. Which teachings of Jesus are hardest for you to accept?

v. When have you been tempted to walk away? What kept you?

vi. How has your belief grown into knowing over time?

PRACTICE

When you feel a craving this week (for food, a screen, approval), let it remind you to pray: "You are the bread of life."

PRAY

Tell Him plainly: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Pray for anyone you know who has walked away.

SESSION SIX

I Was Blind, Now I See

John 9:1–41

Read this week: John 8–9

Jesus opens blind eyes, and the people most in danger are the ones certain they can already see.

WARM UP

Have you ever been completely sure about something and turned out to be wrong?

STUDY

Who sinned? (vv. 1–7). The disciples see a man blind from birth and assume a cause. Someone must have sinned. It is a very human instinct. When we meet suffering we want a reason and a formula. Jesus dismantles it: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." He does not say sin has no consequences. He refuses to reduce suffering to a simple equation. Then He makes mud, sends the man to wash, and the man comes back seeing.

We pray for healing because Jesus heals, and we ask boldly because He is powerful. But this passage gives us no formula. Our part is to bring the need to Him. His part is to decide how to respond.

The interrogation (vv. 13–34). The rest of the chapter is a trial. The Pharisees question the man, then his parents, then the man again. They are confident, established, and certain, and they miss the Messiah standing in front of them. The healed man has no theological training. He only has a testimony: "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." That is the testimony of every believer. Our stories differ, but the miracle is the same. At some point Jesus turned the light on.

Notice how his sight keeps growing. First he calls Jesus "the man called Jesus," then "a prophet," then a man "from God." The more pressure they apply, the clearer he sees. And for it, they throw him out.

Found (vv. 35–41). Jesus hears that he has been cast out and goes to find him. The man says, "Lord, I believe," and worships. Then Jesus gives the verdict: He came "that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Spiritual blindness is subtle. You can function,

achieve, and even be religious while unable to see your sin, God, or yourself rightly. The Pharisees ask, "Are we also blind?" Their claim to see is exactly what keeps them guilty.

This is the pattern across these chapters. In John 8, a woman caught in sin hears, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." The humble are welcomed. The certain are exposed.

WORD TO KNOW

Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5): Jesus is the one in whom we finally see things as they are: God, ourselves, and the world.

DISCUSS

i. Why do we look for someone to blame when we see suffering? How does Jesus's answer change the question?

ii. What do you learn here about praying for healing?

iii. The man could not answer every question, but he knew what had happened to him. What is your "one thing I do know"?

iv. How did opposition sharpen his faith? Has that ever happened to you?

v. What makes religious certainty so dangerous? Where might you be sure you see when you do not?

vi. Jesus went looking for the man after he was thrown out. What does that tell you about Him?

PRACTICE

Write your testimony in three sentences: what you were, what Jesus did, what is different now. Share it with one person.

PRAY

Ask Jesus to show you where you are blind. Thank Him for the day He turned the light on.

SESSION SEVEN

The Resurrection and the Life

John 11:1–44

Read this week: John 10–11

Jesus loves us even when He delays, and He has authority over the thing we fear most.

WARM UP

When have you had to wait for something much longer than you wanted to?

STUDY

When love delays (vv. 1–16). John makes something painfully clear. Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. "So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer." He loved them, so He stayed. That disrupts our assumptions. We believe love removes suffering as quickly as possible. Here Jesus does the opposite. Love does not always spare us pain. Sometimes it allows it, for a glory we cannot yet see.

This is the same Jesus who said in the previous chapter, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11). A hired hand runs when the wolf comes. The Good Shepherd does not calculate the cost. His delay is never desertion.

Faith that works now (vv. 17–27). Lazarus has been dead four days. Martha runs to Jesus. Her faith is real and her theology is sound. She believes in the resurrection on the last day. But it is deferred. She believes in resurrection as a future event and does not yet see that resurrection is standing in front of her as a Person. "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." We do the same. We believe God will act someday and struggle to believe He is present today.

Jesus wept (vv. 28–37). Mary falls at His feet, and Jesus is deeply moved. He knows He is about to raise Lazarus, and He weeps anyway. He does not rush past grief. He enters it.

Move the stone (vv. 38–44). "Take away the stone." Martha objects, and her objection is reasonable. It has been four days. There will be an odor. He is too far gone. Our excuses often sound just as sensible. The Spirit prompts you to apologize, to confess, to forgive, and you explain

to God why obedience is impractical. Jesus does not withdraw the command. "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" They move the stone. He calls Lazarus by name, and the dead man walks out.

Notice the partnership. Only Jesus can raise the dead. But He asks them to move the stone and to unbind the grave clothes. He does what only He can do, and He gives us our part.

WORD TO KNOW

Glory (*doxa*): the weight and radiance of who God is, put on display. In John, the place it shines brightest is the cross.

DISCUSS

i. How do you square "Jesus loved them" with "he stayed two days longer"?

ii. Where are you living in a delay right now? What are you tempted to conclude about God?

iii. Martha's faith was accurate but postponed. Where do you believe God can act someday but not today?

iv. What does "Jesus wept" tell you about how He meets you in grief?

v. What "stone" is He telling you to move that feels impractical or too late?

vi. Who needs you to help unbind them?

PRACTICE

Do the one act of obedience you have been explaining away. Move the stone.

PRAY

Bring Him what you believe is too far gone. Pray for those who are grieving.

SESSION EIGHT

The Hour Has Come

John 12:20–33 and 13:1–17

Read this week: John 12–17

The path to glory runs through death, and the Lord of all stoops to wash feet.

WARM UP

What is the most humbling job you have ever had to do?

STUDY

No death, no fruit (12:20–26). Some Greeks ask to see Jesus. He does not give a strategy for expansion. He talks about dying. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." He is speaking first of Himself. The cross is not failure. It is multiplication. Then He turns it toward us: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me." We prefer fruit without burial, growth without surrender, and glory without a cross. Jesus offers no such thing.

The cross is the verdict (12:27–33). The crowd will think they are judging Jesus. Pilate will question Him and the council will condemn Him. But Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of this world." At the cross the world is exposed for what it does when left to itself, and sin is condemned in the body of Christ. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

He loved them to the end (13:1). With less than a day before the cross, Jesus does not gather crowds or defend His reputation. He gathers His friends and shares a meal. When time was short, love took priority. "To the end" means to the fullest extent. He loved them knowing they would fail Him.

The basin and the towel (13:2–17). Knowing "that the Father had given all things into his hands," Jesus rises, ties a towel around His waist, and washes the disciples' feet. All of them. He washes Peter's feet, and He washes the feet of Judas. He knew exactly what Judas would do and knelt before him anyway. The reason Christians love their enemies is that Christ loved His.

Peter protests, then asks to be washed all over. Jesus answers that one who has bathed needs only his feet washed. When you came to Christ you were bathed, completely clean. But you still walk through a broken world, and your feet get dirty. That does not undo your salvation. It disrupts your fellowship. The answer is not to be saved again. It is to be cleansed again.

Then the command: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

> WORD TO KNOW
>
> *Hour* (*hōra*): throughout John, Jesus's "hour had not yet come." Here it arrives. The hour is His death, resurrection, and return to the Father.

DISCUSS

i. Where do you want fruit without anything dying?

ii. How is the cross a judgment on the world as well as a rescue for it?

iii. If you had one evening left, how would you spend it? What does Jesus's choice show you?

iv. Jesus washed Judas's feet. What does loving an enemy look like without pretending the harm did not happen?

v. Do you tend to doubt that you are clean, or to ignore that your feet are dirty?

vi. Whose feet is Jesus asking you to wash?

> PRACTICE
>
> Do one unseen act of service this week for someone who cannot repay you, or who has not treated you well.
>
> PRAY
>
> Thank Him that He loved you to the end. Ask for a servant's heart.

SESSION NINE

It Is Finished

John 18:1–11 and 19:16–30

Read this week: John 18–19

No one took His life. He laid it down, on purpose, for you.

WARM UP

When have you finished something truly difficult? What did it feel like to say, "It is done"?

STUDY

The garden (18:1–11). John tells us the arrest happens in a garden, and the detail is not incidental. The story of our ruin began in a garden, and now the story of our rescue returns to one. In the first garden, Adam hid. In this one, Jesus steps forward. In the first, a man chose his own will over God's. In this one, a Man chooses the Father's will over His own.

John wants us to see that in His moment of deepest weakness, Jesus never stopped being God. He is not cornered or captured. "Knowing all that would happen to him," He comes forward and asks whom they seek. When He answers, "I am he," armed soldiers draw back and fall to the ground. Then He gives Himself up and protects His friends: "let these men go." When Peter swings a sword, Jesus stops him. "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

The slow slide (18:15–27). Peter follows, but only so far. Close enough to watch and far enough to stay safe. The man who swore he would die for Jesus is undone, not by a soldier, but by a servant girl at a door. He denies Him three times, beside a charcoal fire. Failure rarely arrives all at once. It comes one small step at a time.

The King on the cross (19:16–27). Pilate has a sign written: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." He means it as mockery, and it is the truth. The soldiers gamble for His tunic, and Scripture is fulfilled. And from the cross, in agony, Jesus looks at His mother and makes sure she will be cared for. Even here, He is loving His own to the end.

It is finished (19:28–30). "Jesus, knowing that all was now finished," says, "I thirst." The One who offered living water thirsts so that we never will. Then He says, "It is finished," bows His head, and gives up His spirit.

He does not say "I am finished." It is the cry of completed work. The debt is paid. Nothing remains to be added. Every attempt to earn what He has already won is a way of saying it was not enough.

WORD TO KNOW

It is finished (*tetelestai*): accomplished, completed, paid in full. One word in Greek.

DISCUSS

i. What stands out when you set the Garden of Eden beside the garden of the arrest?

ii. Why does it matter that Jesus gave Himself up and was not simply overpowered?

iii. Trace Peter's slide. What were the small steps? Where do you see them in yourself?

iv. What does Jesus's care for His mother from the cross show you?

v. What are you still trying to add to "It is finished"?

vi. How would you live this week if you believed your debt was fully paid?

PRACTICE

Read John 19 aloud, slowly, on your own. Then sit in silence for five minutes.

PRAY

Thank Him, specifically and out loud, for the cross.

SESSION TEN

That You May Believe

John 20:11–31 and 21:1–19

Read this week: John 20–21

The risen Jesus meets grief, doubt, and failure, and He turns each one into faith.

WARM UP

Has anyone ever given you a second chance you did not deserve?

STUDY

Mary: He calls you by name (20:11–18). It was still dark when Mary came to the tomb. She found it open and assumed the worst. The resurrection does not arrive as a theory or an argument. It arrives as a Person standing in a garden at dawn. Mary is weeping so hard that she mistakes the risen Lord for the gardener. She is looking straight at the answer to every tear, and she does not recognize Him. Sorrow can do that. Then He says one word: "Mary." And that was enough.

Thomas: My Lord and my God (20:24–29). Thomas missed it. When the others told him, he refused to take their word for it. We have been hard on Thomas, but watch what Jesus does. A week later He comes again, and He does not shame him or lock him out. He offers the very proof Thomas demanded. "Put your finger here." Jesus is not afraid of an honest question. And Thomas answers with the highest confession in the Gospel: "My Lord and my God!"

Peter: back to the charcoal fire (21:1–19). The disciples have gone back to fishing. They work all night and catch nothing. It is a picture of life when we are not sure where we stand with Jesus. We return to the familiar, work hard, and the nets come up empty. At dawn a voice from the shore tells them to cast on the other side, and the net fills. John says, "It is the Lord!"

On the beach is a charcoal fire. Peter denied Jesus three times beside one. Jesus does not avoid the place of failure. He returns Peter to it, on purpose, to heal it. Three times He asks, "do you love me?" He is not twisting the knife. He is unwinding the denial. And each time He answers with a calling: "Feed my sheep." Failure had not disqualified him. Then come the same words that began it all: "Follow me."

Why John wrote (20:30–31). "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Ten weeks ago we began with the Word who was with God. John's question at the end is simple. Do you believe?

WORD TO KNOW

Believe (*pisteuō*): John uses the verb nearly a hundred times and never the noun. For him, faith is not something you have. It is something you do: you trust a Person.

DISCUSS

i. Which of the three (Mary, Thomas, Peter) do you most identify with right now?

ii. When has sorrow kept you from recognizing that Jesus was near?

iii. What honest question or doubt have you been afraid to bring to Him?

iv. Is there a "charcoal fire" in your life, a place of failure He may want to take you back to and heal?

v. Jesus restored Peter with a calling. What might He be calling you to after your failures?

vi. Looking back over ten weeks: who is Jesus to you now? How would you answer John's question?

PRACTICE

Read John 20:31 and write a one-page answer to the question, "Who do I believe Jesus is, and what am I going to do about it?" Share it with your group or a friend.

PRAY

Pray for each person by name, that they would believe and have life in His name.

APPENDIX

For Leaders

Your job is not to teach the passage a second time. It is to help people meet Jesus in it. A few suggestions:

- **Read the passage aloud first, every time.** Let John speak before anyone else does.
- **Keep Jesus at the center.** In every scene ask two questions: what does this show us about who He is, and how are people responding to Him?
- **Go first.** A group will only be as honest as its leader. Answer the hardest question yourself before you ask anyone else to.
- **Make room for seekers.** John wrote for people who do not yet believe. Welcome questions and doubts. Jesus did.
- **Follow up on the practice.** Begin each session by asking how last week's practice went.
- **Protect the room.** What is shared in the group stays in the group.

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Soli Deo Gloria